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A DAUGHTER OF TO-DAY

A Nobel

BY

MRS. EVERARD COTES

(SARA JEANNETTE DUNCAN)

AUTHOR OF

"A SOCIAL DEPARTURE," "AN AMERICAN GIRL IN LONDON," ETC.



IN TWO VOLUMES

VOL. II.

London

CHATTO & WINDUS, PICCADILLY

1894

A DAUGHTER OF TO-DAY.

CHAPTER XVII.

"I AM sure you are enjoying it," said Elfrida.

"Yes," Miss Kimpsey returned; "it's a great treat—it's a very great treat. Everything surpasses my expectations; everything is older and blacker and more interesting than I looked for. And I must say we're getting over a great deal in the time. Yesterday afternoon we did the entire Tower. It *did* give one an idea! But of course you know every stone in it by now!"

"I'm afraid I've not seen it," Elfrida confessed gravely. "I know it's shocking of me."

"You haven't visited the Tower! Doesn't

that show how benumbing opportunity is to the energies! Now, I dare say that I," Miss Kimpsey went on with gratification, "coming over with a party of tourists from our State, all bound to get London, and the cathedral towns, and the Lakes, and Scotland and Paris and Switzerland into the summer vacation—I presume I may have seen more of the London sights than you have, Miss Bell." As Miss Kimpsey spoke, she realized that she had had no intention of calling Elfrida "Miss Bell" when she saw her again, and wondered why she did it. "But you ought to be fond of sight-seeing, too," she added, "with your artistic nature."

Elfrida seemed to restrain a smile. "I don't know that I am," she said. "I'm sorry that you didn't leave my mother so well as she ought to be. She hasn't mentioned it in her letters." In the course of time Miss Bell's correspondence with her parents had duly re-established itself.

"She *wouldn't*, Elf—Miss Bell. She was afraid of suggesting the obligation to come

home to you. She said, with your artistic conscience, you couldn't come, and it would be inflicting unnecessary pain upon you. But her bronchitis was no light matter last February. She was real sick."

"My mother is always so considerate," Elfrida answered, reddening, with composed lips. "She is better now, I think you said?"

"Oh yes, she's some better. I heard from her last week, and she says she doesn't know how to wait to see me back. That's on your account, of course. Well, I can tell her you appear comfortable"—Miss Kimpsey looked around—"if I can't tell her exactly when you'll be home."

"That is so doubtful, just now——"

"They're introducing drawing from casts in the High School," Miss Kimpsey went on, with a note of urgency in her little twanging voice, "and Mrs. Bell told me I might just mention it to you. She thinks you could easily get taken on to teach it. I just dropped round to one or two of the principal trustees the day before I left, and they said you had

only to apply. It's seven hundred dollars a year."

Elfrida's eyebrows contracted. "Thanks, very much! It was extremely kind—to go to so much trouble. But I have decided that I am not meant to be an artist, Miss Kimpsey," she said, with a self-contained smile. "I think my mother knows that. I—I don't much like talking about it. Do you find London confusing? I was dreadfully puzzled at first."

"I *would* if I were alone! I'd engage a special policeman—the policemen *are* polite, aren't they? But we keep the party together you see, to economize time, so none of us get lost. We all went down Cheapside this morning, and bought umbrellas—two and three apiece. This is the most reasonable place for umbrellas. But isn't it ridiculous to pay for apples by the *pound*, and then they're not worth eating! This room does smell of tobacco! I suppose the gentleman in the apartment below smokes a great deal?"

"I think he does. I'm so sorry. Let me open another window."

“Oh, don’t mind *me*! I don’t object to tobacco, except on board ship. But it must be bad to sleep in.”

“Perhaps,” said Elfrida, sweetly. “And have you no more news from home for me, Miss Kimpsey?”

“I don’t know as I have. You’ve heard of the Rev. Mr. Snider’s second marriage to Mrs. Abraham Peeley, of course. There’s a great deal of feeling about it in Sparta—the first Mrs. Snider was so popular, you know—and it isn’t a full year. People say it isn’t the *marriage* they object to, under such circumstances; it’s—all that goes before,” said Miss Kimpsey with decorous repression; and Elfrida burst into a peal of laughter.

“Really,” she sobbed, “it’s too delicious! Mr. and Mrs. Snider! Do you think people woo with improper warmth—at that age, Miss Kimpsey?”

“I don’t know anything about it,” Miss Kimpsey declared, with literal truth. “I suppose such things justify themselves somehow, especially when it’s a clergyman. And

of course you know about your mother's idea of coming over here to settle?"

"No!" said Elfrida, arrested. "She hasn't mentioned it. Do they talk of it seriously?"

"I don't know about *seriously*. Mr. Bell doesn't seem as if he could make up his mind. He's so fond of Sparta, you know. But Mrs. Bell is just wild to come. She thinks, of course, of having you to live with them again; and then she says that on their present income—— You will excuse my referring to your parents' reduced circumstances, Miss Bell?"

"Please go on."

"Your mother considers that Mr. Bell's means would go further in England than America. She asked me to make inquiries, and I must say, judging from the price of umbrellas and woollen goods, I think they would."

Elfrida was silent for a moment, looking steadfastly at the possibility Miss Kimpsey had developed.

"What a complication!" she said half to

herself; and then observing Miss Kimpsey's look of astonishment—"I had no idea of that," she repeated. "I wonder that they have not mentioned it."

"Well, then," said Miss Kimpsey, with sudden compunction, "I presume they wanted to surprise you! And I've gone and spoiled it."

"To surprise me," Elfrida repeated in her absorption. "Oh yes! very likely!"

Inwardly she saw her garret—the garret that so exhaled her, where she had tasted success and knew a happiness that never altogether failed—vanish into a snug cottage in Hampstead or Surbiton. She saw the ruin of her independence, of her delicious solitariness, of the life that began and ended in her sense of the strange and the beautiful and the grotesque in a world of curious slaveries of which it suited her to be an alien spectator, amused and free. She foresaw long conflicts and discussions, prying which she could not prevent, justifications which would be forced upon her, obligations which she must not refuse. More intolerable

still, she saw herself in the *rôle* of family idol, the household happiness hinging on her moods, the question of her health, her work, her pleasure, being the eternally chief one.

Miss Kimpsey talked on about other things, Windsor Castle, the Abbey, the Queen's stables ; and Elfrida made occasional replies, politely vague. She was mechanically twisting the little gold hoop on her wrist, and thinking of the artistic sufferings of a family idol. Obviously the only thing was to destroy the prospective shrine.

"We don't find board as cheap as we expected," Miss Kimpsey was saying.

"Living—that is, food—is very expensive," Elfrida replied quickly ; "a good beefsteak, for instance, costs three francs—I mean two and fivepence a pound."

"I can't think in shillings !" Miss Kimpsey interposed plaintively.

"And about this idea my people have of coming over here—I've been living in London five months now, and I can't quite see your grounds for thinking it cheaper than Sparta, Miss Kimpsey."

“Of course you *have* had time to judge of it.”

“Yes. On the whole, I think they would find it more expensive and much less satisfactory. They would miss their friends, and their places in the little world over there—my mother, I know, attaches a good deal of importance to that. They would have to live very moderately in a suburb, and all the nice suburbs have their social relations in town. They wouldn’t take the slightest interest in English institutions—my father is too good a citizen to make a good subject—and they would find a great many English ideas very—trying. The only Americans who are happy in England are the millionaires,” Elfrida added. “I mean the millionaires who are not too sensitive.”

“Well now you have got as sensitive a nature as I know, Miss Bell, and you don’t appear to be miserable over here.”

“I?” Elfrida frowned just perceptibly. This little creature, who once corrected the punctuation of her essays, and gave her bad marks for spelling, was too intolerably

personal. "We won't consider my case, if you please. Perhaps I am not a good American."

"Mrs. Bell seems to think she would enjoy the atmosphere of the past in London."

"It's a fatal atmosphere for asthma. Please impress that upon my people, Miss Kimpsey. There would be no justification in letting my mother believe she could be comfortable here. She must come and experience the atmosphere of the past as you are doing, in a visit. As soon as it can be afforded I hope they will do that."

Since the day of her engagement with the *Illustrated Age*, Elfrida had been writing long, affectionate and prettily-worded letters to her mother by every American mail. They were models of sweet elegance, those letters, they abounded in dainty bits of description and gay comment, and they reflected as little of the real life of the girl who wrote them as it is possible to conceive. In this way they were quite remarkable, and in their charming discrimination of topics. It was as if Elfrida dictated that a certain

relation should exist between herself and her parents. It should acknowledge all the traditions, but it should not be too intimate. They had no such claim upon her, no such closeness to her as Nádie Palicky, for instance, had.

When Miss Kimpsey went away that afternoon, trying to realize the intrinsic reward of virtue—she had been obliged to give up the National Gallery to make this visit—Elfrida remembered that the American mail went out next day, and spent a longer time than usual over her weekly letter. In its course she mentioned with some amusement the absurd idea Miss Kimpsey had managed to absorb of their coming to London to live, and touched in the lightest possible way upon the considerations that made such a project impossible. But the greater part of the letter was taken up with a pleased forecast of the time—couldn't it possibly be next summer?—when Mr. and Mrs. Bell would cross the Atlantic on a holiday trip.

“I will be quite an affluent person by then,” Elfrida wrote, “and I will be able to

devote the whole of my magnificent leisure to entertaining you."

She turned from the sealing of this to answer a note from Lawrence Cardiff. He wrote to her on odds and ends of matters almost as often as Janet did, now. He wrote as often, indeed, as he could, and always with an amused uncertain expectancy of what the consciously directed little square envelopes which brought back the reply would contain. It was becoming obvious to him that they brought something a little different in expression, or feeling, or suggestion from the notes that came for Janet, which Janet often read out for their common benefit. He was unable to define the difference, but he was aware that it gave him pleasure, especially as he could not find that it was in any way connected with the respectful consideration that Elfrida might have thought due to his forty-seven years.

If Mr. Cardiff had gone so far as to soliloquize upon the subject he would have said to himself, "In my trade a man gets too much of that." I do not know that he did, but the

subtle gratification this difference gave him was quite strong enough, at all events, to lead to the reflection. The perception of it was growing so vivid that he instinctively read his notes in silence, paraphrasing them for Janet, if she happened to be there. They had, as it were, a bloom and a freshness, a mere perfume of personality that would infallibly vanish in the communicating, but that left him as often as not, when he slipped the note back into the envelope, with a half smile on his lips.

Janet was conscious of the smile, and of the paraphrasing. In reprisal—though she would not have admitted it was that—she kept her own missives from Elfrida to herself whenever it occurred to her to check the generous impulse of sharing the pleasure they gave her, which was not often, after all. It was the seldomer because she could not help feeling that her father was thoroughly aware of her action, and fancied that he speculated upon the reason of it. It was unendurable that daddy should speculate about the reason of anything she did in con-

nection with Frida—or with any other young lady. Her conduct was perfectly simple—there was no reason whatever why it should not be perfectly simple.

When Miss Kimpsey arrived at Euston Station next day, with all her company, to take the train for Scotland, she found Elfrida waiting for her, a picturesque figure in the hurrying crowd, with her hair blown about her face with the gusts of wind and rain, and her wide dark eyes looking quietly about her. She had a bunch of azaleas in her hand, and as Miss Kimpsey was saying with gratification that Elfrida's coming down to see her off was a thing she did *not* expect, Miss Bell offered her these.

“They will be pleasant in the train, perhaps,” said she. “And do you think you could find room for this in one of your boxes? It isn't very bulky—a trifle I should like so much to send to my mother, Miss Kimpsey. It might go by post, I know—but the pleasure will be much greater to her if you could take it.”

In due course Mrs. Bell received the

packet. It contained a delicate lace head-dress, which cost Elfrida the full pay and emoluments of a fortnight. Mrs. Bell wore it at all social gatherings of any importance in Sparta the following winter, and often reflected with considerable pleasure upon the taste and unselfishness that so obviously accompanied the gift.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IF John Kendal had been an onlooker at the little episode of Lady Halifax's drawing-room in Paris six months earlier, it would have filled him with the purest amusement. He would have added the circumstance to his conception of the type of young woman who enacted it, and turned away without stopping to consider whether it flattered her or not. His comprehension of human nature was too catholic very readily to permit him impressions either of wonder or contempt; it would have been a matter of registration and a smile. Realizing this, Kendal was the more at a loss to explain to himself the feeling of irritation which the recollection of the scene persistently aroused in him, in spite of a pronounced disposition, of which he could not help being aware, not to register it, but to

ignore it. His memory refused to be a party to his intention, and the tableau occurred to him with a persistence which he found distinctly disagreeable. Upon every social occasion which brought young ladies of beauty and middle-aged gentlemen of impressive eminence into conversational contact, he saw the thing in imagination done again. In the end it suggested itself to him as paintable—the astonished drawing-room, the graceful, half-kneeling girl with the bent head, the other dismayed and uncomprehending figure yielding a doubtful hand, his discomfort indicated in the very lines of his waistcoat. “*A Fin de Siècle Tribute*,” Kendal named it. He dismissed the idea as absurd, and then reconsidered it as a means of disposing of the incident finally. He knew it could be very effectually put away on canvas. He assured himself again that he could not entertain the idea of painting it seriously, and that this was because of the inevitable tendency which the subject would have toward caricature. Kendal had an indignant contempt for such a tendency, and the liberty which men who used it

took with their art. He had never descended to the flouting of his own aims which it implied. He threw himself into his pictures without reserve: it was the best of him that he painted, the strongest he could do, and all he could do; he was sincere enough to take it always seriously. The possibility of caricature seemed to him to account admirably for his reluctance to paint "*A Fin de Siècle Tribute*"—it was a matter of conscience. He found that the desire to paint it would not go, however; it took daily more complete possession of him, and fought his scruples with a strong hand. It was a fortnight after, and he had not seen Elfrida in the mean time, when they were finally defeated by the argument that a sketch would show whether caricature were necessarily inherent or not. He would make a sketch purely for his own satisfaction. Under the circumstances Kendal realized perfectly that it could never be for exhibition, and indeed he felt a singular shrinking from the idea that any one should see it. Finally he gave a whole day to the thing, and made an admirable sketch.

After that, Kendal felt free to make the most of his opportunities of seeing Elfrida; his irritation with her had subsided, her blunder had been settled to his satisfaction. He had an obscure idea of having inflicted discipline upon her in giving the incident form and colour upon canvas, in arresting its grotesqueness, and sounding its true *motif* with a pictorial tongue. It was his conception of the girl that he punished, and he let his fascinated speculation go out to her afterward at a redoubled rate. She brought him sometimes to the verge of approval, to the edge of liking; and when he found that he could not take the further step, he told himself impatiently that it was not a case for anything so ordinary as approval, or anything so personal as liking. It was a matter of observation, enjoyment, stimulus. He availed himself of these abstractions with a candour that was the more open for not being complicated with any less hardy motive. He had long ago decided that relations of sentiment with Elfrida would require a temperament quite different from that of any man he

knew. It was entirely otherwise with Janet Cardiff, and Kendal smiled as he thought of the feminine variation the two girls illustrated. He had a distinct recollection of one crisp October afternoon before he went to Paris, as they walked home together under the brown-ing curling leaves and past the Serpentine, when he had found that the old charm of Janet's grey eyes was changing to a new one. He remembered the pleasure he had felt in dallying with the thought of making them lustrous one day with tenderness for himself. It had paled since then, there had been so many other things; but still, they were dear, honest eyes——and Kendal never brought his reverie to a conclusion under any circumstances whatever.

CHAPTER XIX.

I HAVE mentioned that Miss Bell had looked considerations of sentiment very full in the face, at an age when she might have been expected to be blushing and quivering before them with downcast countenance. She had arrived at conclusions about them, conclusions of philosophic indifference and some contempt. She had since frequently talked about them to Janet Cardiff with curious disregard of time and circumstance, mentioning her opinion in a Strand omnibus, for instance, that the only dignity attaching to love as between a man and a woman was that of an artistic idea. Janet had found Elfrida possessed of so savage a literalism in this regard that it was only in the most hardily adventurous of the moods of investigation her friend inspired that she cared to combat her here. It was

not, Janet told herself, that she was afraid to face the truth in any degree of nakedness; but she rose in hot inward rebellion against Elfrida's borrowed psychological cynicisms—they were not the truth, Tolstoi had not all the facts, perhaps from pure Muscovite inability to comprehend them all. The spirituality of love might be a Western product—she was half inclined to think it was—but at all events it existed; and it was wanton to leave out of consideration a thing that made all the difference. Moreover if these things ought to be probed—and Janet was not of serious opinion that they ought to be—for her part she preferred to obtain advices thereon from between admissible and respectable book-covers. It hurt her to hear them drop from Elfrida's lips—lips so plainly meant for all tenderness. Janet had an instinct of helpless anger when she heard them—the woman in her rose in protest, less on behalf of her sex than on behalf of Elfrida herself, who seemed so blind, so willing to revile, so anxious to reject. “Do you really hope you will

marry?" Elfrida had asked her once; and Janet had answered candidly, "Of course I do—and I want to die a grandmother too." "*Vraiment!*" exclaimed Miss Bell, ironically, with a little shudder of disgust, "I hope you may!"

That was in the very beginning of their friendship however, and so vital a subject could not remain outside the relations which established themselves more and more intimately between them as the days went on. Janet began to find herself constantly in the presence of a temptation to bring the matter home to Elfrida personally in one way or another, as young women commonly do with other young women who are obstinately unorthodox in these things—to say to her in effect, "Your turn will come when *he* comes! These pseudo-philosophies will vanish when *he* looks at them—like snow in spring. You will succumb—you will succumb!" But she never did. Something in Elfrida's attitude forbade it. Her opinions were not vagaries, and she held them, so far as they had a personal application, haughtily. Janet felt

and disliked the tacit limitation, and preferred to avoid the clash of their opinions when she could. Besides, her own ideas upon the subject had latterly retired irretrievably from the light of discussion. She had one day found it necessary to lock the door of her soul upon them; in the new knowledge that had taken sweet possession of her, she recognized that they were no longer theoretical—they must be put away. She challenged herself to sit in a jury upon Love, and found herself disqualified.

The discovery had no remarkable effect upon Janet. She sometimes wasted an hour, pen in hand, in inconsequent reverie, and worked till midnight to make up; and she took a great liking for impersonal conversations with Miss Halifax about Kendal's pictures, methods, and meanings. She found dining in Royal Geographical circles less of a bore than usual, and deliberately laid herself out to talk well. She looked in the glass sometimes at a little vertical line that seemed to be coming at the corners of her mouth, and wondered whether at twenty-four one

might expect the first indication of approaching old-maidenhood. When she was paler than usual, she reflected that the season was taking a good deal out of her. She was bravely and rigidly commonplace with Kendal, who told her that she ought to drop it and go out of town—she was not looking well. She drew closer to her father; and at the same time armed her secret against him at all points. Janet would have had any one know rather than he. She felt that it implied almost a breach of faith, of comradeship, to say nothing of the complication of her dignity, which she wanted upheld in his eyes before all others. In reality, she made him more the sovereign of her affections and the censor of her relations than nature designed Lawrence Cardiff to be in the parental connection. It gave him great pleasure that he could make his daughter a friend, and accord her the independence of a friend; it was a satisfaction to him that she was not obtrusively filial. Her feeling for Kendal under the circumstances would have hurt him if he had known of it, but only

through his sympathy and his affection; he was unacquainted with the jealousy of a father. But in Janet's eyes they made their little world together, indispensable to each other as its imaginary hemispheres. She had a quiet pain, in the infrequent moments when she allowed herself the full realization of her love for Kendal, in the knowledge that she of her own motion had disturbed its unities and its ascendencies.

Since that evening at Lady Halifax's, when Janet saw John Kendal reddening so unaccountably, she had felt singularly more tolerant of Elfrida's theories. She combated them as vigorously as ever, but she lost her dislike to discussing them. As it became more and more obvious that Kendal found in Elfrida a reward for the considerable amount of time he spent in her society, Janet arrived at the point of encouraging her heresies, especially with their personal application. She took sweet comfort in them; she hoped they would not change, and she was too honest to disguise to herself the reason. If Elfrida cared for him,

Janet assured herself, the case would be entirely different; she would stamp out her own feeling, without mercy, to the tiniest spark. She would be glad, in time, to have crushed it for Elfrida, though it did seem that it would be more easily done for a stranger, somebody she wouldn't have to know afterwards. But if Elfrida didn't care, as a matter of principle Janet was unable to see the least harm in making her say so as often as possible. They were talking together in the Cardiffs' library late one June afternoon, when it seemed to Janet that the crisis came, that she could never again speak of such matters to Elfrida without betraying herself. Things were growing dim about the room; the trees stood in dusky groups in the square outside. There was the white glimmer of the tea-things between them, and just light enough to define the shadows round the other girl's face, and write upon it the difference it bore, in Janet's eyes, to every other face.

"Oh," Elfrida was saying, "it does make life more interesting, I admit—up to a cer-

tain point. And I suppose it is to be condoned, from the point of view of the species! Whoever started us, and wants us to go on, excuses marriage, I suppose. And, of course, the men are not affected by it. But for women it is degrading—horrible! especially for women like you and me, to whom life may mean something else. Fancy being the author of babies, when one could be the author of books! *Don't* tell me you'd rather!"

"I!" said Janet. "Oh, I'm out of it! But I approve the principle."

"Besides, the commonplaceness, the eternal routine, the being tied together, the—the domestic virtues! It must be death, absolute death, to any fineness of nature. No," Elfrida went on decisively, "people with anything in them that is worth saving may love as much as they feel disposed, but they ought to keep their freedom. And some of them do nowadays."

"Do you mean," said Janet slowly, "that they dispense with the ceremony?"

"They dispense with the condition. They—they don't go so far."

“I thought you didn’t believe in Platonics,” Janet answered, with wilful misunderstanding.

“You know I don’t believe in them—any more,” Elfrida added lightly, “than I believe in this exaltation you impute to the race of a passion it shares with—with the mollusks. It’s pure self-flattery.”

There was a moment’s silence. Elfrida clasped her hands behind her head and turned her face toward the window, so that all the light that came through was softly gathered in it. Janet felt the girl’s beauty as if it were a burden, pressing with literal physical weight upon her heart. She made a futile effort to lift it with words. “Elfrida,” she said, “you are beautiful to—to hurt, to-night. Why has nobody ever painted a creature like you?”

It was as if she touched an inner spring of the girl’s nature, touched it electrically. Elfrida leaned forward consciously, with shining eyes. “Truly, am I, Janetta? Ah—to-night! Well, yes, perhaps to-night I am. It is an effect of chiaroscuro. But

what about always—what about generally, Janetta? I have such horrid doubts. If it weren't for my nose I should be satisfied—yes, I think I should be satisfied. But I *can't* deceive myself about my nose, Janetta,—it's thick."

"It isn't a particularly spiritually-minded nose," Janet laughed; "but console yourself—it's thoughtful."

Elfrida put her elbows on her knees, and framed her face with the palms of her hands. "If I am beautiful to-night you ought to love me. Do you love me, Janetta? really *love* me? Could you imagine," she went on, with a whimsical, spoiled shake of her head, "any one else doing it?"

Janetta's fingers closed tightly on the arm of her chair. Was it coming already, then? "Yes," she said slowly, "I could imagine it well."

"More than one?" Elfrida insisted prettily. "More than two or three? A dozen, perhaps?"

"Quite a dozen," Janet smiled. "Is that to be the limit of your heartless proceedings?"

"I don't know how soon one would grow tired of it. Maybe in three or four years. But for now—it is very amusing."

"Playing with fire?"

"Bah!" Elfrida returned, going back to her other mood, "I'm not inflammable. But to that extent, if you like, I value what you and the poets are pleased to call love. It's part of the game—one might as well play it all! It's splendid to win—anything. It's a kind of success."

"Oh, I know," she went on, after an instant. "I have done it before—I shall do it again, often! It is worth doing—to sit within three feet of a human being who would give all he possesses just to touch your hand—and to tacitly dare him to do it."

"Stop, Elfrida!"

"Shan't stop, my dear. Not only to be able to check any such demonstration yourself, with a movement, a glance, a turn of your head; but without even a sign, to make your would-be adorer check it himself,—and to feel as still and calm, and superior to it all! Is that nothing to you?"

“It’s less than nothing. It’s hideous.”

“I consider it a compensation vested in the few for the wrongs of the many,” Elfrida replied gaily. “And I mean to store up all the compensation in my proper person that I can.”

“I believe you have had more than your share already,” Janet cried.

“Oh no, a little, only a little. Hardly anything here—people fall in love in England in such a mathematical way! But there is a callow artist on the *Age*; and Golightly Ticke has become quite mad lately; and Solomon, I mean Mr. Rattray, will propose next week—he thinks I won’t dare to refuse the sub-editor! How I shall laugh at him! Afterwards, if he gives me any trouble, I shall threaten to write up the interview for the *Pictorial News*. On the whole, though, I dare say I’d better not suggest such a thing—he would want it for the *Age*. He is equal to any personal sacrifice for the *Age*.”

“Is that all?” asked Janet, turning away her head.

“You are thinking of John Kendal! Ah,

there it becomes exciting. From what you see, Janetta *mia*, what should you *think*? Myself, I don't quite know. Don't you find him rather—a good deal—interested?"

Janet had an impulse of thankfulness for the growing darkness. "I—I see him so seldom," she said. Oh, it was the last time, the very last time she would let Elfrida talk like this.

"Well, I think so," Elfrida went on coolly. "He fancies he finds me curious, original, a type—just now. I dare say he thinks he takes an anthropological pleasure in my society! But in the beginning it is all the same thing, my dear, and in the end it will be all the same thing. This delicious Loti"—and she picked up "*Aziàdé*"—"what an anthropologist he is—with a feminine bias!"

Janet was tongue-tied. She struggled with herself for an instant, and then—"I *wish* you'd stay and dine," she said desperately.

"How thoughtless of me!" Elfrida replied, jumping up. "You ought to be dressing, dear. No, I can't; I've got to sup with some ladies

of the Alhambra to-night—it will make such lovely copy. But I'll go now, this very instant."

Halfway downstairs, Janet, in a passion of helpless tears, heard Elfrida's footsteps pause and turn. She stepped swiftly into her own room, and locked the door. The footsteps came tripping back into the library, and then a tap sounded on Janet's door. Outside Elfrida's voice said plaintively—

"I had to come back. *Do* you love me?—are you quite sure you love me?"

"You humbug!" Janet called from within, steadying her voice with an effort, "I'm not at all sure. I'll tell you to-morrow."

"But you do," cried Elfrida, departing. "I know you do."

CHAPTER XX.

JULY thickened down upon London. The society papers announced that, with the exception of the few unfortunate gentlemen who were compelled to stay and look after their constituents' interests at Westminster, "everybody" had gone out of town, and filled up yawning columns with detailed information as to everybody's destination. To an experienced eye, with the point of view of the top of an Uxbridge Road omnibus, for instance, it might not appear that London had diminished more than to the extent of a few powdered footmen on carriage-boxes; but the census of the London world is, after all, not to be taken from the top of an Uxbridge Road omnibus. London teemed emptily; the tall houses in the narrow lanes of Mayfair slept

standing; the sunlight filtered through a depressing haze, and stood still in the streets for hours together. In the Park the policemen wooed the nursery-maids free from the embarrassing smiling scrutiny of people to whom this serious preoccupation is a diversion. The main thoroughfares were full of "summer sales," St. Paul's echoed to admiring Transatlantic criticism, and the Bloomsbury boarding-houses to voluble Transatlantic complaint.

The Halifaxes were at Brighton; Lady Halifax giving musical teas, Miss Halifax painting marine views in a little book. Miss Halifax called them "impressions," and always distributed them at the musical teas. The Cardiffs had gone to Scotland for golf, and later for grouse; Janet was almost as expert on the links as her father, and on very familiar terms with a certain Highland moor and one Donald Macleod. They had laid every compulsion upon Elfrida to go with them in vain; the girl's sensitiveness on the point of money obligations was intense, and Janet failed to measure it accurately when

she allowed herself to feel hurt that their relations did not preclude the necessity for taking any thought as to who paid. Elfrida stayed, however, in her by-way of Fleet Street, and did a little bit of excellent work for the *Illustrated Age* every day. If it had not been for the editor-in-chief, Rattray would have extended her scope on the paper ; but the editor-in-chief said no, Miss Bell was dangerous ; there was no telling what she might be up to if they gave her the reins. She went very well, but she was all the better for the severest kind of a bit.

So Miss Bell wrote about colonial exhibitions and popular spectacles and country outings for babies of the slums, and longed for a fairer field. As midsummer came on there arrived a dearth in these objects of orthodox interest, and Rattray told her she might submit "anything on the nail" that occurred to her, in addition to such work as the office could give her to do. Then, in spite of the editor-in-chief, an odd, unconventional bit of writing crept now and then into

the *Age*—an interview with some eccentric notability which read like a page from Gyp, a bit of pathos picked out of the common streets, a fragment of character-drawing which smiled visibly and talked audibly. Elfrida, in her garret, drew a joy from these things. She cut them out, and read them over and over again, and put them sacredly away with Nádíe's letters and a manuscript poem of a certain Bruynotin's, and a scrawl from one Hakkoff with a vigorous sketch of herself from memory, in pen and ink, in the corner of the page, in the little eastern-smelling wooden box, which seemed to her to represent the core of her existence. They quickened her pulse, they gave her a curious uplifted happiness that took absolutely no account of any other circumstance.

There were days when Mrs. Jordan had real twinges of conscience about the quality of Miss Bell's steak. "But there," Mrs. Jordan would soothe herself, "I might bring her the best sulline, and she wouldn't know no difference!" In other practical respects the girl was equally indifferent. Her clothes were

shabby, and she did not seem to think of replacing them. Mrs. Jordan made preposterous charges for candles, and she paid them without question. She tipped people who did little services for her with a kind of royal delicacy. The girl who scrubbed the landings worshipped her, and the boy who came every day for her copy once brought her a resplendent "button-hole," consisting of two pink rosebuds and a scarlet geranium, tendering it with a shy lie to the effect that he had found it in the street. She went alone now and again to the opera, taking an obscure place; and she lived a good deal among the foreign art exhibitions of Bond Street. Once she bought an etching, and brought it home under her arm. That kept her poor for a month, though she would have been less aware of it if she had not, before the month was out, wanted to buy another. A great Parisian actress had made her yearly visit to London in June, and Elfrida, conjuring with the name of the *Illustrated Age*, won an appointment from her. The artiste stayed only a fortnight—she declared that one half

of an English audience came to see her because it was proper and the other because it was sinful, and she found it insupportable, —and in that time she asked Elfrida three times to pay her morning visits, when she appeared in her dressing-gown, little unconventional visits “pour bavarder.” When Miss Bell lacked entertainment during the weeks that followed, she thought of these visits, and little smiles chased each other round the corners of her mouth.

She wrote to Janet, when she was in the mood, delicious scraps of letters, broad-margined, fantastic, each so far as charm went a little literary gem disguised in wilfulness, in a picture, in a diamond-cut cynicism that shone sharper and clearer for the dainty affectation of its setting. When she was not in the mood she did not write at all. With an instinctive recognition of the demands of any relation such as she felt her friendship with Janet Cardiff to be, she simply refrained from imposing upon her anything that savoured of dullness or commonplaceness. So that sometimes she wrote

three or four times in a week, and sometimes not at all for a fortnight; sometimes covered pages, and sometimes sent three lines and a row of asterisks. There was a fancifulness in the hour as well, that usually made itself felt all through the letter: it was rainy twilight in her garret, or a grey wideness was creeping up behind St. Paul's which meant that it was morning. To what she herself was actually doing, or to any material fact about her, they made the very slightest reference. Janet, in Scotland, perceived half of this, and felt aggrieved on the score of the other half. She wished more often than she said she did, that Elfrida were a little more human, that she had a more appreciative understanding of the warm value of everyday matter between people who were interested in one another. The subtle imprisoned soul in Elfrida's letters always spoke to hers, but Janet never received so artistic a missive of three lines that she did not wish it were longer, and she had no fund of confidence to draw on to meet her friend's incomprehensible spaces of silence. To cover her real soreness

she scolded, chaffed brusquely, affected lofty sarcasms.

“Twelve days ago,” she wrote, “you mentioned casually that you were threatened with pneumonia; your communication of to-day you devote to proving that Hector Malot is a carpenter. I agree with you with reservations, but the sequence worries me. In the mean time, have you had the pneumonia?”

Her own letters were long and gossiping, full of the scent of the heather and the eccentricities of Donald Macleod; and she wrote them regularly twice a week, using rainy afternoons for the purpose, and every inch of the paper at her disposal. Elfrida put a very few of them into the wooden box, just as she would have embalmed, if she could, a very few of the half-hours they had spent together.

CHAPTER XXI.

JOHN KENDAL turned the key upon his dusty workroom in Bryanston Street among the first of those who, according to the papers, depopulated London in July. He had an old engagement to keep, which took him with Carew of the *Dial* and Limley of the Civil Service to explore and fish in the Norwegian fjords. The project matured suddenly, and he left town without seeing anybody—a necessity which disturbed him a number of times on the voyage. He wrote a hasty line to Janet, returning a borrowed book, and sent a trivial message to Elfrida, whom he knew to be spending a few days in Kensington Square at the time. Janet delivered it with an intensity of quiet pleasure which she showed

extraordinary skill in concealing. "May I ask you to say to Miss Bell," seemed to her to be eloquent of many things. She looked at Elfrida with inquiry, in spite of herself, when she gave the message, but Elfrida received it with a nod and a smile of perfect indifference. "It is because she does not care—does not care *an iota*," Janet told herself; and all that day it seemed to her that Elfrida's personality was inexhaustibly delightful.

Afterwards, however, one or two letters found their way into the sandal-wood box, bearing the Norwegian post-mark. They came seldomer than Elfrida expected. "*Enfin!*" she said when the first arrived, and she felt her pulse beat a little faster as she opened it. She read it eagerly with serious lips, thinking how fine he was, and with what exquisite force he brought himself to her as he wrote. "I must be a very exceptionable person," she said in her reverie afterwards, "to have such things written to me! I must—*I must!*" Then, as she put the letter away, she reflected that she couldn't amuse herself with Kendal

without treachery to their artistic relationship; there would be somehow an outrage in it. And she would not amuse herself with him; she would sacrifice that, and be quite frank and simple always. So that when *it* came to pass—here Elfrida retired into a lower depth of consciousness—there would be only a little pity and a little pain and no reproach or regret.

There was a delay in the arrival of the next letter, which Elfrida felt to be unaccountable—a delay of nearly three weeks. She took it with an odd rush of feeling from the hand of the housemaid who brought it up, and locked herself in alone with it.

A few days later, driving through Bryanston Street in a hansom, Elfrida saw the windows of Kendal's studio wide open. She leaned forward to realize it with a little tumult of excitement at the possibility it indicated, half turned to bid the cabman stop, and rolled on undecided. Presently she spoke to him—

“Please go back to No. 63,” she said; “I want to get out there;” and in a

moment or two she was tripping lightly up the stairs.

Kendal, in his shirt-sleeves, with his back to the door, was bending over a palette that clung obstinately to the hardened round dabs of colour he had left upon it six weeks before. He threw it down at Elfrida's step, and turned with a sudden light of pleasure in his face to see her framed in the doorway, looking at him with an odd shyness and silence.

"You spirit!" he cried. "How did you know I had come back?" and he held her hand for just an appreciable instant, regarding her with simple delight.

Her tinge of embarrassment became her sweetly, and the pleasure in his eyes made her almost instantly aware of this.

"I didn't know," she said with a smile that shared his feeling. "I saw the windows open, and I thought the woman downstairs might be messing about here. They can do such incalculable damage when they really set their minds to it, these *concierge* people. So I—I came up to interfere. But it is you!" She looked at him with wide happy

eyes, which sent the satisfaction she found in saying that to his inmost consciousness.

"It was extremely good of you," he said, and, in spite of himself, a certain emphasis crept into the commonplace. "I hardly realize myself that I am here. It might very well be the Skaagerak outside."

"Does the sea in Norway sound like that?" Elfrida asked, as the roar of London came across muffled from Piccadilly. She made a little theatrical movement of her head to listen, and Kendal's appreciation of it was so evident that she failed to notice exactly what he answered. "You have come back sooner than you intended?"

"By a month."

"Why?" she asked. Her eyes made a soft bravado, but that was lost. He did not guess for a moment that she believed she knew why he had come.

"It was necessary," he answered with remembered gravity, "in connection with the death of—of a relative, a grand-uncle of mine. The old fellow went off suddenly last week, and they telegraphed for me. I believe he

wanted to see me, poor old chap, but of course I was too late."

"Oh!" said Elfrida, gently, "that is very sad. Was it a grand-uncle you were—fond of?"

Kendal could not restrain a smile at her earnestness.

"I was, in a way. He was a good old fellow, and he lived to a great age—over ninety. He has left me all the duties and responsibilities of his estate," Kendal went on with sudden gloom. "The Lord only knows what I'll do with them."

"That makes it sadder," said the girl.

"I should think it did," Kendal replied.

Their eyes met, and they laughed the healthy instinctive laugh of youth when it is asked to mourn fatuously, which is always a little cruel.

"I hope," said Elfrida, quickly, "that he has not saddled you with a title. An estate is bad enough, but with a title added, it would ruin you. You would never do any more good work, I am sure—sure. People would get at you. You would take to rearing

farm creatures from a sense of duty. You might go into Parliament! Tell me there is no title?"

"How do you know all that!" Kendal exclaimed, laughing. "But there is no title, never has been."

Elfrida drew a long sigh of relief, and held him with her eyes as if he had just been snatched away from some impending danger. "So now you are—what do you say in this country?—a landed proprietor! You belong to the country gentry! In America I used to read about the country gentry in *London Society*. All the contributors and all the subscribers to *London Society* used to be country gentry, I believe, from what I remember. They were always riding to hounds, and having big Christmas parties, and telling ghost-stories about the family diamonds."

"All very proper!" Kendal protested against the irony of her tone.

"Oh, if one could be quite *sure* that it will not make any difference!" Elfrida went on, clasping her knee with her shapely gloved

hands. "I should like—I should like to beg you to make me a promise that you will never give up your work—your splendid work!" She hesitated, and looked at him almost with supplication. "But then, why should you make such a promise to *me*?"

They were sitting opposite one another in the dusty confusion of the room, and when she said this Kendal got up, and walked over to her, without knowing exactly why.

"If I made such a promise," he said, looking down at her, "it would be more binding given to you than to anybody else—more binding and more sacred."

If she had exacted it, he would have promised then and there; and he had some vague notion of sealing the vow with his lips upon her hand, and of arranging—this was more indefinite still—that she should always insist, in her sweet personal way, upon its fulfilment. But Elfrida felt the intensity in his voice with a kind of fear, not of the situation—she had a nervous delight in the situation—but of herself. She had a sudden terror in his coming

so close to her, in his changed voice; and its sharpness lay in her recognition of it. Why should she be frightened? She jumped up gaily, with the question still throbbing in her throat.

"No!" she cried, "you shall not promise me. I'll form a solemn committee of your friends—your *real* friends—and we'll come some day and exact an oath from you, individually and collectively. That will be much more impressive. I must go now," she went on reproachfully. "And you have shown me nothing that you've brought back with you. Is there anything here?" In her anxiety to put space between them, she had walked to the furthest and untidiest corner of the room, where half a dozen canvases leant with their faces to the wall.

Kendal watched her tilt them forward one after another, with a kind of sick impotence. "Absolutely nothing!" he cried.

But it was too late. She had paused in her running commentary on the pictures; she was standing, looking, absolutely silent, at the last but one. She had come upon it;

she had found it—his sketch of the scene in Lady Halifax's drawing-room.

“Oh yes, there is something!” she said at last, carefully drawing it out and holding it at arm's length. “Something that is quite new to me. Do you mind if I put it in a better light?” Her voice had wonderfully changed; it expressed a curious interest and self-control. In effect that was all she felt for the moment. She had a dull consciousness of a blow, but did not yet quite understand being struck. She was gathering herself together as she looked, growing conscious of her hurt and of her resentment.

Kendal was silent, cursing himself inwardly for not having destroyed the thing the day after he had let himself do it.

“Yes,” she said, placing it on an easel at an oblique angle with the north window of the room. “It is better so.”

She stepped back a few paces to look at it, and stood immovable, searching every detail. “It does you credit,” she said slowly—“immense credit. Oh, it is very clever.”

"Forgive me!" Kendal said, taking a step towards her. "I am afraid it doesn't. But I never intended you to see it."

"Is it an order?" she asked calmly. "Ah! but that would not have been fair—not to show it to me first!"

Kendal crimsoned. "I beg," he said earnestly, "that you will not think such a thing possible. I intended to destroy it. I don't know why I have not destroyed it."

"But why? It is so good, so charming, so—so *true*! You did it for your own amusement, then? But that was very selfish."

For answer, Kendal caught up a tube of Indian red, squeezed it on the crusted palette, loaded a brush with it, and dashed it across the sketch. It was a feeble piece of bravado, and he felt it; but he must convince her in some way that the thing was worthless to him.

"Ah," she said, "that is a pity," and she walked to the door. She must get away, quite away, and quickly, to realize this thing, to find out exactly what it meant to her.

And yet, three steps down the stairs she turned and came back again.

John Kendal stood where she had left him, staring at the sketch on the easel.

“I have come back to thank you,” Elfrida said quickly, “for showing me what a fool I made of myself;” and she was gone.

An hour later, Kendal had not ceased to belabour himself, but the contemplation of the sketch—he had not looked at it for two months—brought him to the conclusion that perhaps, after all, it might have some salutary effect. He found himself so curiously sore about it though, so thoroughly inclined to call himself a traitor, and a person without obligation, that he went back to Norway the following week—a course which left a number of worthy people in the neighbourhood of Bigton, Devonshire, very indignant indeed.

CHAPTER XXII.

"DADDY," Janet said to her father, a few days after their return to town, "I've been thinking that we might — that you might be of use in helping Frida to place something somewhere else than in that eternal picture paper."

"For instance?"

"Oh, in *Peterson's* or the *London Magazine*, or *Piccadilly*."

It was in the library after dinner, and Lawrence Cardiff was smoking. He took the slender stem of his pipe from his lips, and pressed down the tobacco in the bowl with a caressing thumb, looking appreciatively as he did it at the mocking buffoon's face that was carved on it.

"It seems to me that you are the influential person in those quarters," he said,

with the smile that Janet privately thought the most delightfully sympathetic she knew.

“Oh, I’m not really!” the girl answered quickly. “And besides”—she hesitated, to pick words that would hurt her as little as possible—“besides, Frida wouldn’t care about my doing it.”

“Why?”

“I don’t know quite why; but she wouldn’t. It’s of no use. I don’t think she likes having things done for her by people anything like her own age and—and standing.”

Cardiff smiled inwardly at this small insincerity. Janet’s relation with Elfrida was a growing pleasure to him. He found himself doing little things to enhance it, and fancying himself in some way connected with its initiation.

“But I’m almost certain she would let you do it,” his daughter urged.

“*In loco parentis.*” Cardiff smiled, and immediately found that the words left an unpleasant taste in his mouth. “But I’m not at all sure that she could do anything they would take.”

“My dear daddy!” cried Janet, resentfully. “Wait till she tries. You said yourself that some of those scraps she sent us in Scotland were delicious!”

“So they were. She has a curious prismatic kind of mind.”

“Soul, daddy.”

“Soul, if you like. It reflects quite wonderfully, the angles at which it finds itself with the world are so unusual. But I doubt her power, you know, of construction or cohesion or anything of that kind.”

“I don’t,” Janet returned confidently. “But talk to her about it, daddy; get her to show you what she’s done. I never see a line till it’s in print. And—I don’t know anything about it, you know. Above all things, don’t let her know that I suggested it!”

“I’ll see what can be done,” Mr. Cardiff returned, “though I profess myself faithless. Elfrida wasn’t designed to please the public of the magazines—in England.”

When Janet reflected afterwards upon what had struck her as being odd about this remark of her father’s, she found it

was Elfrida's name. It seemed to have escaped him—he had never referred to her in that way before—which was a wonder, Janet assured herself, considering how constantly he heard it from her lips.

“How does the novel come on?” Mr. Cardiff asked before she went to bed that night. “When am I to be allowed to see the proofs?”

“I finished the nineteenth chapter yesterday,” Janet answered, flushing. “It will only run to about twenty-three. It's a very little one, daddy.”

“Still nobody in the secret but Lash and Black?”

“Not a soul. I hope they're the right people,” Janet said anxiously. “I haven't even told Elfrida,” she added. “I want to surprise her with an early copy. She'll like it, I think. I like it pretty well myself. It has an effective leading idea.”

Her father laughed, and threw her a line of Horace, which she did not understand. “Don't let it take too much time from your other work,” he warned her. “It's sure,

you know, to be an arrant imitation of somebody, while in your other things you have never been anybody but yourself." He looked at her in a way that disarmed his words, and went back to his *Revue Bleue*.

"Dear old thing! You want to prepare me for anything, don't you? I wonder whom I've imitated. Hardy, I think, most of all; but then it's such a ludicrously far-away imitation! If there's nothing in the thing but *that*, it deserves to fall as flat as flat! But there is, daddy!"

Cardiff laid down his journal again at the appealing note.

"No!" she cried, "I won't bore you with it now. Wait till the proofs come. Good night!" She kissed him lightly on the cheek. "About Elfrida," she added, still bending over him. "You'll be *very* careful, won't you, daddy dear—not to hurt her feelings in any way, I mean?"

After she had gone, Lawrence Cardiff laid down the *Revue* again, and smoked meditatively for half an hour. During that time he revolved at least five subjects

which he thought Elfrida, with proper supervision, might treat effectively. But the supervision would be very necessary.

A fortnight later Mr. Cardiff sat in the same chair, smoking the same pipe, and alternately frowned and smiled upon the result of that evening's meditation. It had reached him by post in the afternoon without an accompanying word; the exquisite self-conscious manuscript seemed to breathe a subdued defiance at him, with the merest ghost of a perfume that Cardiff liked better. Once or twice he held the pages closer to his face to catch it more perfectly. Janet had not mentioned the matter to him again; indeed, she had hardly thought of it. Her whole nature was absorbed in her fight with herself, in the struggle for self-control, which had ceased to come to the surface of her life at intervals, and was now constant and supreme with her. Kendal had made it harder for her lately by continually talking of Elfrida. He brought his interest in her to Janet to discuss, as he naturally brought everything that touched him to her, and

Janet, believing it to be a lover's pleasure, could not forbid him. When he criticized Elfrida, Janet fancied it was to hear her warm defence, which grew oddly reckless in her anxiety to hide the bitterness that tinged it.

"Otherwise," she permitted herself to reflect, "he is curiously just in his analysis of her—for a man," and hated the thought for its touch of disloyalty.

Knowing Elfrida as she thought she knew her, Kendal's talk wounded her once for herself and twice for him. He was going on blindly, confidently, trusting, Janet thought bitterly, to his own sweetness of nature, to his comeliness and the fineness of his sympathies—who had ever refused him anything yet?—and only to his hurt, to his repulse, from the point of view of sentiment, to his ruin! For it did not seem possible to Janet that a hopeless passion for a being like Elfrida Bell could result in anything but collapse. Whenever he came to Kensington Square—and he came often—she went down to meet him with a quaking heart, and

sought his face nervously for the haggard, broken look which should mean that he had asked Elfrida to marry him and been artistically refused. Always she looked in vain. Indeed, Kendal's spirits were so uniformly like a schoolboy's that once or twice she asked herself, with sudden terror, whether Elfrida had deceived her—whether it might not be otherwise between them—recognizing then, with infinite humiliation, how much worse that would be. She took to working extravagantly hard, and Elfrida noticed with distinct pleasure how much warmer her manner had grown, and in how many pretty ways she showed her enthusiasm. Janet was such a conquest! Once, when Kendal seemed to Janet on the point of asking her what she thought of his chances, she went to a florist's in the High, and sent Elfrida a pot of snowy chrysanthemums. After which she allowed herself to refrain from seeing her for a week. Her talk with her father about helping Elfrida to place her work with the magazines had been one of the constant impulses by which she tried to

compensate her friend, as it were, for the amount of suffering that young woman was inflicting upon her. She would have found a difficulty in explaining it more intelligibly than that.

As he settled together the pages of Miss Bell's article on "The Nemesis of Romanticism," and laid them on the table, Lawrence Cardiff thought of it with sincere regret.

"It is hopeless—hopeless," he said to himself. "It must be rewritten from end to end. I suppose she must do it herself," he added with a smile that he drew from some memory of her, and he pulled writing materials towards him to tell her so. Re-reading his brief note, he frowned, hesitated, and tore it up. The next followed it into the waste-paper basket. The third gave Elfrida to understand that in Mr. Cardiff's opinion the article was a little unbalanced—she would remember her demand that he should be absolutely frank. She had made some delightful points, but there was a lack of plan and symmetry. If she would give

him the opportunity, he would be very happy to go over it with her, and possibly she would make a few changes. More than this Cardiff could not induce himself to say. And he would await her answer before sending her article back to her.

It came next day, and in response to it Mr. Cardiff found himself walking, with singular lightness of step, toward Fleet Street in the afternoon, with Elfrida's manuscript in his pocket. Buddha smiled more inscrutably than ever as they went over it together, while the water hissed in the samovar in the corner, and little blue flames chased themselves in and out of the anthracite in the grate, and the queer Orientalism of the little room made its picturesque appeal to Cardiff's senses. He had never been there before.

From beginning to end they went over the manuscript, he criticizing and suggesting, she gravely listening and insatiately spurring him on.

"You may say anything," she declared. "The sharper it is the better, you know, for

me! Please don't be polite—be savage!” and he did his best to comply.

She would not always be convinced; he had to leave some points unvanquished, but in the main she agreed and was grateful. She would remodel the article, she told him, and she would remember all that he had said.

Cardiff found her recognition of the trouble he had taken delightful. It was nothing, he declared; he hoped very particularly that she would let him be of use, if possible, often again. He felt an inexplicable jar when she suddenly said, “Did you ever do anything—of this sort—for Janet?” and he was obliged to reply that he never did. Her look of disappointment was keen. “She thought,” he reflected, “that I hoisted Janet into literature, and could be utilized again, perhaps!” In which he did her injustice. But he lingered over his tea, and when he took her hand to bid her good-bye, he looked down at her and said, “Was I very brutal?” in a way which amused her for quite half an hour after he had gone.

Cardiff sent the amended article to the *London Magazine* with qualms. It was so unsuitable even there, that he hardly expected his name to do much for it, and the half-hour he devoted to persuading his literary conscience to let him send it was very uncomfortable indeed. Privately he thought any journalist would be rather an ass to print it, yet he sincerely hoped the editor of the *London Magazine* would prove himself such an ass. He selected the *London Magazine* because it seemed to him that the quality of its matter had lately been slightly deteriorating. A few days later, when he dropped in at the office, impatient at the delay, to ask the fate of the article, he was distinctly disappointed to find that the editor had failed to approach it in the character he had mentally assigned to him. That gentleman took the manuscript out of the left-hand drawer of his writing-table, and fingered the pages over with a kind of disparaging consideration before handing it back.

“I’m sorry, Cardiff, but we can’t do anything with this, I’m afraid. We have—we

have one or two things covering the same ground already in hand." And he looked at his visitor with some curiosity. It was a queer article to have come through Lawrence Cardiff.

Cardiff resented the look more than the article. "It's of no consequence, thanks," he said dryly. "Very good of you to look at it. But you print a great deal worse stuff, you know."

His private reflection was different, however, and led him to devote the following evening to making certain additions to the sense and alterations in the style of Elfrida's views on "The Nemesis of Romanticism," which enabled him to say, at about one o'clock in the morning, "*Enfin!* it is passable!" He took it to Elfrida on his way from his lecture next day. She met him at the door of her attic with expectant eyes—she was certain of success.

"Have they taken it?" she cried. "Tell me quick—quick!"

When he said "No"—the editor of the *London Magazine* had shown himself an idiot;

he was very sorry, but they would try again—he thought she was going to cry. But her face changed as he went on, telling her frankly what he thought, and showing her what he had done.

“I’ve only improved it for the benefit of the Philistines,” he said apologetically. “I hope you will forgive me.”

“And now,” she said at last, with a little hard air, “what do you propose?”

“I propose that if you approve these trifling alterations, we send the article to the *British Review*. And they are certain to take it.”

Elfrida held out her hand for the manuscript, and he gave it to her. She looked at every page again. It was at least half rewritten in Cardiff’s small cramped hand.

“Thank-you,” she said slowly, “thank-you—very much! I have learned a great deal, I think, from what you have been kind enough to tell me and to write here. But this, of course, so far as I am concerned in it, is a failure——”

“Oh no!” he protested.

“An utter failure,” she went on, un-noticingly, “and it has served its purpose. There!” she cried with sudden passion, and in an instant the manuscript was flaming in the grate.

“Please—please go away!” she sobbed, leaning against the mantel in a sudden betrayal of tears, and Cardiff, resisting the temptation to take her in his arms and bid her be comforted, went.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. RATTRAY'S proposal occurred as soon after the close of the season as he was able to find time to devote the amount of attention to it which he felt it required. He put it off deliberately till then, fearing that it might entail a degree of mental agitation on his part that would have an undesirable reflex action upon the paper. Mr. Rattray had never been really attracted toward matrimony before, although he had taken, in a discussion in the columns of the *Age* upon the careworn query "Is Marriage a Failure?" a vigorous negative side, under various pen-names which argued not only inclination but experience. He felt, therefore, that he could not possibly predicate anything of himself under the circumstances, and that it would be distinctly the part of wisdom to wait until there was

less going on. Mr. Rattray had an indefinite idea that in case of a rejection he might find it necessary to go out of town for some weeks to pull himself together again—it was the traditional course,—and if such an exigency occurred before July, the office would go to pieces under the pressure of events. So he waited, becoming every day more enthusiastically aware of the great advantage of having Miss Bell permanently connected with the paper under supervision which would be even more highly authorized than an editor's, and growing, at the same time, more thoroughly impressed with the unusual character of her personal charm. Elfrida was a “find” to Mr. Arthur Rattray from a newspaper point of view, a find he gave himself credit for sagaciously recognizing, and one which it would be expedient to obtain complete possession of before its market value should become known. And it was hardly possible for Mr. Rattray to divest himself of the newspaper point of view in the consideration of anything which concerned him personally. It struck him as

uniquely fortunate that his own advantage and that of the *Age* should tally, as it undoubtedly might in this instance; which, for Arthur Rattray, was putting the matter in a rather high, almost disinterested connection.

It is doubtful whether to this day Mr. Rattray fully understands his rejection—it was done so deftly, so frankly, yet with such a delicate consideration for his feelings. He took it, he assured himself afterwards, without winking; but it is unlikely that he felt sufficiently indebted to the manner of its administration, in congratulating himself upon this point. It may be, too, that he left Miss Bell with the impression that her intention never to marry was not an immovable one, given indefinite time and indefinite abstinence, on his part, from alluding to the subject. Certainly he found himself surprisingly little cast down by the event, and more resolved than ever to make the editor-in-chief admit that Elfrida's contributions were "the brightest things in the paper" and act accordingly. He realized, in the course of time, that he had never been very confident of any other

answer, but nothing is more certain than that it acted as a curious stimulus to his interest in Elfrida's work. He had long before found a co-enthusiast in Golightly Ticke, and on more than one occasion they agreed that something must be done to bring Miss Bell before the public, to put within her reach the opportunity of the success she deserved, which was of the order Mr. Rattray described as "screaming."

"So far as the booming is concerned," said Mr. Rattray to Mr. Ticke, "I will attend to that, but there must be something to boom. We can't sound the loud tocsin on a lot of our own paras. She must do something that will go between two covers."

The men were talking in Golightly's room, over easeful Sunday afternoon cigars; and as Rattray spoke they heard a light step mount the stairs.

"There she is now," replied Ticke. "Suppose we go up, and propose it to her."

"I wish I knew what to suggest," Rattray returned; "but we might talk it over with

her when she's had time to take off her bonnet."

Ten minutes later Elfrida was laughing at their ambitions. "A success?" she exclaimed. "Oh yes! I mean to have a success—one day. But not yet—oh no! First I must learn to write a line decently, then a paragraph, then a page. I must wait, oh, a very long time—ten years, perhaps; five, anyway."

"Oh, if you do that," protested Golightly Ticke, "it will be like decanted champagne. A success at nineteen——"

"Twenty-one," corrected Elfrida.

"Twenty-one, if you like—is a sparkling success. A success at thirty-one is—well, it lacks the accompaniments."

"You are a great deal too exacting, Miss Bell," Rattray put in. "Those things you do for us are charming; you know they are."

"You are very good to say so. I'm afraid they are only frivolous scraps."

"My opinion is this," Rattray went on sturdily: "you only want material. Nobody can make bricks without straw—to sell,—and

very few people can evolve books out of the air, that any publisher will look at. You get material for your scraps, and you treat it unconventionally, so the scraps supply a demand. It's a demand that's increasing every day—for fresh unconventional matter. Your ability to treat the scraps proves your ability to do more sustained work if you could find it. Get the material for a book, and I'll guarantee you'll do it well."

Elfrida looked from one to the other with bright eyes. "What do you suggest?" she said, with a nervous little laugh. She had forgotten that she meant to wait ten years.

"That's precisely the difficulty," said Golightly, running his fingers through his hair.

"We must get hold of something," said Rattray. "You have never thought of doing a novel?"

Elfrida shook her head decidedly. "Not now," she said. "I would not dare. I haven't looked at life long enough—I've had hardly any experience at all. I couldn't conceive a single character with any force

or completeness. And then, for a novel one wants a leading idea—the plot, of course, is of no particular consequence. Rather, I should say, plots have merged into leading ideas. And I have none.”

“Oh, distinctly,” observed Mr. Ticke, finely. “A plot is as vulgar at this end of the century as a—as a dress improver, to take a feminine simile.”

Rattray looked seriously uncomprehending, and slowly scratched the back of his hand.

“Couldn’t you find a leading idea in some of the modern movements?” he asked. “The higher education of women, for instance, or the suffrage agitation?”

“Or University Extension, or Bi-metallism, or Eight Hours’ Labour, or Disestablishment?” Elfrida laughed. “No, Mr. Rattray, I don’t think I could. I might do some essays,” she suggested.

Rattray, tilting his chair back, with his forefingers in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, pursed his lips. “We couldn’t get them read,” he said. “It takes a well-established

reputation to carry essays. People will stand them from a Lang or a Stevenson, or that '*Obiter Dicta*' fellow,—not from an unknown young lady——”

Elfrida bit her lip. “Of course I am not any of those.”

“Miss Bell has done some idyllic verse,” volunteered Golightly.

The girl looked at him with serious reprobation. “I did not give you permission to say that,” she said gravely.

“No—forgive me!—but it's true, Rattray.” He searched in his breast pocket and brought out a diminutive pocket-book. “May I show those two little things I copied?” he begged, selecting a folded sheet of letter paper from its contents. “This is serious, you know, really. We must go into all the chances.”

Elfrida had a pang of physical distress. “Oh,” she said hastily, “Mr. Rattray will not care to see those. They weren't written for the *Age*, you know,” she added, forcing a smile.

But Rattray declared that he should like it above all things, and looked the scraps gloomily over. One Elfrida had called “A

Street Minstrel." Seeing him unresponsive,
Golightly read it gracefully aloud :—

"One late November afternoon,
I sudden heard a gentle rune.

I could not see whence came the song,
But, trancèd, stopped and listened long ;

And that drear month gave place to May,
And all the city slipped away.

The coal-carts ceased their din,—instead,
I heard a bluebird overhead ;

The pavements, black with dismal rain,
Grew gently to a country lane ;

Plainly as I see you, my friend,
I saw the lilacs sway and bend,

A blossoming apple-orchard, where
The chimneys fret the foggy air ;

And wide-mown fields of clover sweet
Sent up their fragrance at my feet ;

And once again dear Phillis sat
The thorn beneath, and trimmed her hat.

Long looked I for my wizard bard :
I found him on the boulevard ;

And now my urban hearth he cheers,
Singing all day of sylvan years,

Right thankful for the warmer spot,
A cricket, by July forgot !"

Ticke looked inquiringly at Rattray when

he had finished. Elfrida turned away her head, and tapped the floor impatiently with her foot.

"Isn't that dainty?" demanded Golightly.

"Dainty enough," Rattray responded, with a bored air. "But you can't read it to the public, you know. Poetry is out of the question. Poetry takes genius."

Golightly and Elfrida looked at each other sympathetically. Mr. Ticke's eyes said, "How hideously we are making you suffer!" and Elfrida's conveyed a tacit reproach.

"Travels would do better," Rattray went on. "There's no end of a market for anything new in travels. Go on a walking tour through Spain by yourself, disguised as a nun or something, and write about what you see."

Elfrida flushed with pleasure at the reckless idea. A score of situations rose before her, thrilling, dangerous, picturesque, with a beautiful nun in the foreground.

"I should like it above all things," she said; "but I have no money."

"I'm afraid it would take a good deal," Rattray returned.

"That's a pity."

“It disposes of the question of travelling, though, for the present.” And Elfrida sighed with real regret.

“It’s your turn, Ticke. Suggest something!” Rattray went on. “It must be unusual, and it must be interesting. Miss Bell must do something that no young lady has done before. That much she must concede to the trade. Granting that, the more artistically she does it the better.”

“I should agree to that compromise,” said Elfrida, eagerly; “anything to be left with a free hand.”

“The book should be copiously illustrated,” continued Rattray, “and the illustrations should draw their interest from you personally.”

“I don’t think I should mind that.”

Her imagination was busy at a bound with press criticisms, pirated American editions, newspaper paragraphs describing the colour of her hair, letters from great magazines asking for contributions. It leaped with a fierce joy at the picture of Janet reading these paragraphs, and knowing, whether

she gave or withheld her approval, that the world had pronounced in favour of Elfrida Bell. She wrote the single note with which she would send a copy to Kendal, and somewhere in the book there would be things which he would feel so exquisitely that—— The cover should have a French design, and be the palest yellow. There was a moment's silence while she thought of these things, her knee clasped in her hands, her eyes blindly searching the dull red squares of the Llassa prayer-carpet.

“Rattray,” said Golightly, with a suddenness that made both the others look up expectantly, “could Miss Bell do her present work for the *Age* anywhere?”

“Just now I think it's mostly book-reviews, isn't it? and comments on odds and ends in the papers of interest to ladies. Yes; not quite so well out of London, but I dare say it could be done pretty much anywhere, reasonably near.”

“Then,” replied Golightly Ticke, with a repressed and guarded air, “I think I've got it.”

CHAPTER XXIV.

THREE days later a note from Miss Cardiff in Kensington Square to Miss Bell in Essex Court, Fleet Street, came back unopened. A slanting line in very violet ink along the top read "Out of town for the present. M. Jordan." Janet examined the line carefully, but could extract nothing further from it, except that it had been written with extreme care by a person of limited education and a taste for colour. It occurred to her, in addition, that the person's name was probably Mary.

Elfrida's actions had come to have a curious importance to Janet—she realized how great an importance with the excess of irritated surprise which came to her with this unopened note. In the beginning she had found Elfrida's passionate admiration so

novel and so sweet that her heart was half won before they came together in completer intimacy, and she gave her new, original friend a meed of affection which seemed to strengthen as it instinctively felt itself unreturned, at least in kind. Elfrida retracted none of her admiration, and she added to it, when she ceded her sympathy, the freedom of a fortified city; but Janet hungered for more. Inwardly she cried out for the something warm and human that was lacking to Elfrida's feeling for her; and sometimes she asked herself, with grieved cynicism, how her friend found it worth while to pretend to care so cleverly. More than once she had written to Elfrida with the deliberate purpose of soothing herself by provoking some tenderness in reply, and invariably the key she had struck had been that of homage, more or less whimsically unwilling. "*Don't* write such delicious things to me, *ma mie*," would come the answer. "You make me curl up with envy; what shall I do if malice and all uncharitableness follow? I admire you so horribly—there!" Janet told herself sorely

that she was sick of Elfrida's admiration, it was not the stuff friendships were made of. And a keener pang supervened when she noticed that whatever savoured most of an admiration on her own part had obviously the highest value for her friend. The thought of Kendal only heightened her feeling about Elfrida. She would be so much the stronger, she thought, to resist any—any strain—if she could be quite certain Elfrida cared—cared about her personally. Besides, the indictment that she, Janet, had against her, seemed to make the girl's affection absolutely indispensable.

And now Elfrida had apparently left London without a word. She had dined in Kensington Square the night before, and this was eleven o'clock in the morning. It looked very much as if she had deliberately intended to leave them in the dark as to her movements—people didn't go out of town indefinitely “for the present,” on an hour's notice. The thought brought sudden tears to Janet's eyes, which she winked back angrily. “I am getting to be a perfect old maid!” she re-

flected. “Why shouldn’t Elfrida go to Kamschatka, if she wants to, without giving us notice?” And she frowned upon her sudden resolution to rush off to Fleet Street in a cab, and inquire of Mrs. Jordan. It would be espionage. She would wait, quite calmly and indefinitely, till Frida chose to write, and then she would treat the escapade, whatever it was, with the perfect understanding of good-fellowship. Or perhaps not indefinitely—for two or three days; it was just possible that Frida might have had bad news, and started suddenly for America by the early train to Liverpool, in which case she might easily not have had time to write. But in that case would not Mrs. Jordan have written “Gone to America”? Her heart stood still with another thought—could she have gone with Kendal! Granting that she had made up her mind to marry him, it would be just Elfrida’s strange sensational way. Janet walked the floor in a restless agony, mechanically tearing the note into little strips. She must know—she must find out! She would write and ask him for

something—for what? A book, a paper—the *New Monthly*; and she must have some particular reason. She sat down to write, and pressed her fingers upon her throbbing eyes, in the effort to summon a particular reason. It was as far from her as ever when the maid knocked, and came in with a note from Kendal, asking them to go and see Miss Rehan in “As You Like It” that evening—a note fragrant of tobacco, not an hour old.

“You needn’t wait, Jessie,” she said. “I’ll send an answer later.” And the maid had hardly left the room before Janet was sobbing silently and helplessly with her head on the table.

As the day passed, however, Elfrida’s conduct seemed less unforgivable, and by dinner time she was able to talk of it with simple wonder, which became more tolerant still in the course of the evening, when she discovered that Kendal was as ignorant and as astonished as they themselves.

“She will write,” Janet said hopefully. But a week passed and Elfrida did not write.

A settled disquietude began to make itself felt between the Cardiffs. Accepting each other's silence for the statement that Elfrida had sent no word, they ceased to talk of her—as a topic her departure had become painful to both of them. Janet's anxiety finally conquered her scruples, and she betook herself to Essex Court to inquire of Mrs. Jordan. That lady was provokingly mysterious, and made the difficulty of ascertaining that she knew nothing whatever about Miss Bell's movements as great as possible. Janet saw an acquaintance with some collateral circumstance in her eyes, however, and was just turning away irritated by her attempts to obtain it, when Mrs. Jordan decided that the pleasure of the revelation would be, after all, greater than the pleasure of shielding the facts.

“Wether it 'as anything to do with Miss Bell or not, of course I can't say,” Mrs. Jordan remarked with conscientious hypocrisy, “but Mr. Ticke, *he* left town that same mornin'.” She looked disappointed when Miss Cardiff received this important detail indifferently.

“Oh, nothing whatever!” Janet replied, with additional annoyance that Elfrida should have subjected herself to such an insinuation. Janet had a thorough-going dislike to Golightly Ticke. On her way back in the omnibus she reflected on the coincidence, however, and in the end she did not mention it to her father.

The next day Lawrence Cardiff went to the *Age* office, and had the good fortune to see Mr. Rattray, who was flattered to answer questions regarding Miss Bell’s whereabouts, put by any one he knew to be a friend. Mr. Rattray undertook to apologize for their not hearing of the scheme—it had matured so suddenly, Miss Bell couldn’t really have had time to do more than pack and start—in fact, there had only been three days in which to make all the arrangements. And, of course, the facts were confidential, but there was no reason why Miss Bell’s friends should not be in the secret. Then Mr. Rattray imparted the facts, with a certain conscious gratification. There had been difficulties, but the difficulties had been

surmounted, and he had heard from Miss Bell that morning that everything was going perfectly, and she was getting hold of magnificent copy. He was only sorry it wouldn't be suitable for serial publication in the *Age*, but, as Professor Cardiff was doubtless aware, the British public were kittle cattle to shoe behind, and he hardly thought the *Age* could handle it.

"Oh yes," Mr. Cardiff replied absently. "Cheynemouth, I think you said—for the next five days. Thanks. Successful? I dare say. The idea is certainly a novel one. Good morning!" And he left the sub-editor of the *Illustrated Age* in a state of some uncertainty as to the wisdom of having disclosed so much. Half an hour later, when Kendal, who knew Rattray fairly well, called and asked him for Miss Bell's present address, he got it with some reluctance and fewer details.

Cardiff drove to his club, and wrote a note to Janet, asking her to send his portmanteau to the 3.45 train at Euston, as he intended to run down to Cheynemouth, and might

stay over night. He fastened up the envelope; then, after a moment's hesitation, tore it open, and added, "Miss Bell is attempting a preposterous thing. I am going to see if it cannot be prevented." He fancied Janet would understand his not caring to go into particulars in the mean time. It was because of his aversion to going into particulars that he sent the note and lunched at the club, instead of driving home, as he had abundance of time to do. Janet would have to be content with that; it would be bad enough to have to explain Rattray's intolerable "scheme" to her when it had been frustrated.

After luncheon he went into the smoking-room, and read through three leading articles, with an occasional inkling of their meaning. At the end of the third he became convinced of the absurdity of trying to fix his attention upon anything, and smoked his next Havana with his eyes upon the toe of his boot, in profound meditation. An observant person might have noticed that he passed his hand once or twice lightly, mechanically, over the

top of his head; but even an observant person would hardly have connected the action with Mr. Cardiff's latent idea that, although his hair might be tinged in a damaging way, there was still a good deal of it. Three o'clock found him standing at the club window with his hands in his pockets, and the firm-set lips of a man who has made up his mind, looking unseeingly into the street. At a quarter-past six he was driving to the station in a hansom, smiling at the rosette on the horse's head, which happened to be a white one.

"There's Cardiff," said a man who saw him taking his ticket. "More than ever the *joli garçon*."

An hour and a half later one of the somewhat unprepossessing set of domestics attached to the Mansion Hotel, Cheynemouth, undertook to deliver Mr. Lawrence Cardiff's card to Miss Bell. She didn't remember no such name among the young ladies of the Peach Blossom Company, but she would h'inquire. There was a ladies' drawin'-room upstairs, if he would like to sit down. She

conducted him to the ladies' drawing-room, which boasted two pairs of torn lace curtains; a set of dirty furniture with plush trimmings; several lithographs of mellow Oriental scenes, somewhat undecidedly poised upon the wall; and a marble-topped centre-table, around which were disposed, at careful intervals, three or four copies of last year's illustrated papers. "You can w'yt 'ere, sir," she said, installing him, as it were. "I'll let you know direckly."

At the end of the corridor the girl met Elfrida herself, who took the card with that quickening of her pulse, that sudden commotion, which had come to represent to her, in connection with any critical personal situation, one of the keenest possible sensations of pleasure. "You may tell the gentleman," she said quietly, "that I will come in a moment." Then she went back into her own room, closed the door, and sat down on the side of the bed, with a pale face, and eyes that comprehended, laughed, and were withal a little frightened. That was what she must get rid of, that feeling of fear, that

scent of adverse criticism. She would sit still till she was perfectly calm, perfectly accustomed to the idea that Lawrence Cardiff had come to remonstrate with her, and had come because—because what she had been gradually becoming convinced of all these months was true. He was so clever, so distinguished; he had his eyes, and his voice, and his whole self so perfectly under control that she never could be quite, *quite* sure—but now! And in spite of herself, her heart beat faster at the anticipation of what he might be waiting to say to her, not twenty steps away. She hid her face in the pillow to laugh at the thought of how deliciously the interference of an elderly lover would lend itself to the piece of work which she saw in fascinating development under her hand; and she had an instantaneous flash of regret that she couldn't use it—no, she couldn't possibly. With fingers that trembled a little she twisted her hair into a knot that became her better, and gave an adjusting pat to the fluffy ends round her forehead. “Nous en ferons un comédie ador-

able!" She nodded at the girl in the glass, and then, with the face and manner of a child detected in some mischief, who yet expects to be forgiven, she went into the drawing-room.

At the sight of her all that Cardiff was ready to say vanished from the surface of his mind. The room was already grey in the twilight. He drew her by both hands to the nearest window, and looked at her mutely, searchingly. It seemed to him that she, who was so quick of apprehension, ought to know why he had come without words; and her submission deepened his feeling of a complete understanding between them.

"I've washed it all off," she said naïvely, lifting her face to his scrutiny. "It's not an improvement by daylight, you know."

He smiled a little, but he did not release her hands. "Elfrida, you must come home."

"Let us sit down," she said, drawing them away. He had a trifle too much advantage, standing so close to her, tall and firm in the dusk, knowing what he wanted, and with that

tenderness in his voice. Not that she had the most far-away intention of yielding, but she did not want their little farce to be spoiled by any complications that might mar her pleasure in looking back upon it. "I think," said she, "you will find that a comfortable chair," and she showed him one which stood where all the daylight that came through the torn curtains concentrated itself. From her own seat she could draw her face into the deepest shadow in the room. She made the arrangement almost instinctively, and the lines of intensity the last week had drawn upon Cardiff's face were her first reward.

"I have come to ask you to give up this thing," he said.

Elfrida leaned forward a little in her favourite attitude, clasping her knee. Her eyes were widely serious.

"You ask me to give it up?" she repeated slowly. "But why do you ask me?"

"Because I cannot associate it with you—to me it is impossible that you should do it."

Elfrida lifted her eyebrows a little. "Do you know why I am doing it?" she asked.

"I think so."

"It is not a mere escapade, you understand. And these people do not pay me anything. That is quite just, because I have never learned to act, and I haven't much voice. I can take no part, only just — appear."

"*Appear!*" Cardiff exclaimed. "Have you appeared?"

"Seven times," Elfrida said simply, but she felt that she was blushing.

Cardiff's anger rose up hot within him and strove with his love; and out of it there came a sickening sense of impotency which assailed his very soul. All his life he had had tangibilities to deal with. This was something in the air, and already he felt the apprehension of being baffled here, where he wrought for his heart and his future.

"So that is a part of it," he said, with tightened lips. "I did not know."

"Oh, I insisted upon that," Elfrida replied softly. "I am quite one of them—one of the

young ladies of the Peach Blossom Company. I am learning all their sensations, their little frailties, their vocabulary, their ways of looking at things. I know how the novice feels when she makes her first appearance in the chorus of a spectacle—I've noted every vibration of her nerves. I'm learning all the little jealousies and intrigues among them, and all their histories and ambitions. They are more moral than you may think, but it is not the moral one who is the most interesting. Her virtue is generally a very threadbare, common sort of thing. The—others—have more colour in the fabric of their lives, and you can't think how picturesque their passions are. One of the chorus girls has two children—I feel a brute sometimes at the way she"—Elfrida broke off, and looked out of the window for an instant. "She brings their little clothes into my bedroom to make. Though there is no need, they are in an asylum. She is divorced from their father," she went on coolly, "and he is married to the leading lady! Candidly," she added, looking at him with a courageous

smile, "prejudice apart, is it not magnificent material?"

A storm of words trembled upon the verge of his lips, but his diplomacy instinctively closed them up. "You can never use it," he said instead.

"Perfectly! I am not quite sure about the form—whether I shall write as one of them, or as myself, telling the story of my experience. But I never dreamed of having such an opportunity! If I didn't mean to write a word, I should be glad of it. A look into another world, with its own customs and language and ethics and pleasures and pains—*quelle chance!* And then," she went on, as if to herself, "to be of the life—the strange, unreal, painted, limelighted life that goes on behind the curtain! That is something! To act one's part in it; to know that one's own secret *rôle* is a thousand times more difficult than any in the repertoire! You are horribly unresponsive! We won't talk of it any longer," she added, with a little offended air. "How is Janet?"

"We must talk of it, Elfrida," Cardiff answered. "Let me tell you one thing," he added steadily; "such a book as you propose writing would be classed as the lowest sensationalism. People would compare it with the literature of the Police Court."

Elfrida sprang to her feet, with her head thrown back and her beautiful eyes alight. "'Touché!'" Cardiff thought exultingly.

"You may go too far!" she exclaimed passionately. "There are some things that may not be said."

Cardiff went over to her quickly and took her hand. "Forgive me," he said—"forgive me; I am very much in earnest."

She turned away from him. "You had no right to say it! You know my work, and you know that the ideal of it is everything in the world to me—my religion! How dared you suggest such a comparison?"

Her voice broke, and Cardiff fancied she was on the brink of tears. "Elfrida," he cried miserably, "let us have an end of this! I have no right to intrude my opinions

—if you like, my prejudices—between you and what you are doing. But I have come to beg you to give me the right.” He came a step closer and laid his free hand lightly on her shoulder. “Elfrida,” he said unhesitatingly, “I want you to be my wife.”

“And Janet’s step-mother!” thought the girl swiftly. But she hoped he would not mention Janet. It would burlesque the situation.

“Your going away made me quite sure,” he added simply. “I can never do without you altogether again. Instead, I want to possess you altogether.” He bent his fine face to the level of hers, and took both her hands in his. Elfrida thought that by that light he looked strangely young.

She slipped her hands away, but did not move. He was still very close to her—she could feel his breath upon her hair.

“Oh no,” she said; “marriage is so absurd!” and immediately it occurred to her that she might have put this more effectively. “Cela n’est pas bien dit!” she thought.

“Let us sit down together and talk about it,” he answered gently, and drew her toward the little sofa in the corner.

“But—I am afraid—there is nothing more to say. And in a quarter of an hour I must go.”

Cardiff smiled masterfully. “I could marry you, little one, in a quarter of an hour,” he said.

But at the end of that time Lawrence Cardiff found himself very far from the altar, and more enlightened perhaps than he had ever been before about the radicalism of certain modern sentiments concerning it. She would change, he averred. Might he be allowed to hope that she would change, and to wait—months, years? She would never change, Elfrida avowed, it was useless—quite useless—to think of that. The principle had too deep a root in her being; to tear it up would be to destroy her whole joy in life she said—leaving Cardiff to wonder what she meant.

“I will wait,” he said, as she rose to go, “but you will come back with me now, and

we will write a book—some other book—together.”

The girl laughed gaily. “All alone, myself I must do it,” she answered. “And I must do *this* book. You will approve it when it is done. I am not afraid.”

He had her hands again. “Elfrida,” he threatened, “if you go on the stage to-night in the costume I see so graphically advertised—an Austrian hussar, isn’t it?—I will attend. I will take a box,” he added, wondering at his own brutality. But by any means he must prevail.

Elfrida turned a shade paler. “You will not do that,” she said gravely. “Good-bye. Thank you for having come to persuade me to give this up. And I wish I could do what you would like. But it is quite, quite impossible!” She bent over him, and touched his forehead lightly with her lips. “Good-bye,” she said again, and was gone.

An hour later he was on his way back to town. As the mail train whizzed by another, side-tracked to await its passing,

Mr. Cardiff might have seen Kendal, if there had been time to look, puffing luxuriously in a smoking compartment, and unfolding a copy of the *Illustrated Age*.

CHAPTER XXV.

BEFORE he had been back in Norway a week, Kendal felt his perturbation in regard to Elfrida remarkably quieted and soothed. It seemed to him, in the long hours in which he fished and painted, that in the progress of the little drama, from its opening act at Lady Halifax's to its final scene at the studio, he had arrived at something solid and tangible as the basis of his relation toward the girl. It had precipitated in him a power of comprehending her, and of criticizing her, which he had possessed before only, as it were, in solution. Whatever once held him from stating to himself the results of his study of her had vanished, leaving him no name by which to call it. He found that he could smile at her whimsicalities, and

reflect upon her odd development, and regret her devouring egotism, without the vision of her making dumb his voluble thought; and he no longer regretted the incident that gave him his freedom. He realized her as he painted her; and the realization visited him less often, much less often, than before. Even the fact that she knew what he thought gradually became an agreeable one. There would be room for no hypocrisies between them. He wished that Janet Cardiff could have some such experience. It was provoking that she should be still so loyally *aveuglé*; that he would not be able to discuss Elfrida with her, when he went back to London, from an impersonal point of view. He had a strong desire to say precisely what he thought of her friend to Janet, in which there was an obscure recognition of a duty of reparation; obscure because he had no overt disloyalty to Janet to charge himself with, but none the less present. He saw the intimacy between the two girls from a new point of view; he comprehended the change the months had

made; and he had a feeling of some displeasure that Janet Cardiff should have allowed herself to be so subdued, so seconded in it.

Kendal came back a day or two before Elfrida's disappearance, and saw her only once in the mean time. That was on the evening—which struck him later as one of purposeless duplicity—before the Peach Blossom Company left for the provinces, when he and Elfrida both dined at the Cardiffs'. With him that night she had the air of a chidden child; she was silent and embarrassed, and now and then he caught a glance which told him in so many words that she was very sorry, she hadn't meant to, she would never do it again. He did not for a moment suspect that it all referred to the scene at Lady Halifax's, and that it was more than half real. It was not easy to know that even genuine feeling with Elfrida required a cloak of artifice. He put it down as a pretty pose, and found it as objectionable as the one he had painted. He was more curious, perhaps, but less disturbed than either of the Cardiffs as the days went

by and Elfrida made no sign. He felt, however, that his curiosity was too irreligious to obtrude upon Janet; besides, his knowledge of her hurt anxiety kept him within the bounds of the simplest inquiry; while she, noting his silence, believed him to be eating his heart out. In the end it was the desire to relieve and to satisfy Janet that took him to the *Age* office. It might be impossible for her to make such inquiries, he told himself, but no obligation could possibly attach to him, except—and his heart throbbed affirmatively at this—the obligation of making Janet happier about it. He could have laughed aloud when he heard the scheme from Rattray's lips—it so perfectly filled out his picture, his future projection of Elfrida; he almost assured himself that he had imagined and expected it. But his first motive was suddenly lost in an upstarting brood of impulses that took him to the railway station with the smile still upon his lips. Here was a fresh development; his interest was keenly awake again, he would go and verify the facts. When his earlier intention

re-occurred to him in the train he dismissed it with the thought that what he had seen would be more effective, more disillusionizing, than what he had merely heard. He triumphed in advance over Janet's disillusion, but he thought more eagerly of the pleasure of proving, with his own eyes, another step in the working out of the problem which he believed he had solved in Elfrida.

"Big house to-night, sir! All the stalls taken," said the young man with the high collar in the box-office when Kendal appeared before the window.

"Pit," replied Kendal; and the young man stared.

"Pit, did you say, sir? Well, you'll 'ave to look slippy, or you won't get a seat there either."

Kendal was glad it was a full house. He began to realize how very much he would prefer that Elfrida should not see him there. From his point of view it was perfectly warrantable; he had no sense of any obligation which would prevent his adding to his critical

observation of her—but from Miss Bell's? He found himself lacking the assurance that no importance was to be attached to Miss Bell's point of view, and he turned up his coat collar and pulled his hat over his eyes and seated himself as obscurely as possible, with a satisfactory sense that nobody could take him for a gentleman, mingled with a less agreeable suspicion that it was doubtful whether, under the circumstances, he had a complete right to the title. The overture strung him up more pleasurably than usual however. He wondered if he should recognize her at once, and what part she would have. He did not know the piece, but of course it would be a small one. He wondered—for so far as he knew she had had no experience of the stage—how she could have been got ready in the time to take even a small one. Inevitably it would be a part with three words to say and nothing to sing, probably a maid-servant's. He smiled as he thought how sincerely Elfrida would detest such a personation.

When the curtain rose at last, Mr. John

Kendal searched the stage more eagerly than the presence there of any mistress of her art had ever induced him to do before. The first act was full of gaiety, and the music was very tolerable; but Kendal, scanning one insistent figure and painted face after another, heard nothing, in effect, of what was said or sung—he was conscious only of a strong disappointment when it was over and Elfrida had not appeared.

The curtain went up again to a quick step, to clinking steel, and the sound of light, marching feet. An instant after forty young women were rhythmically advancing and retreating before the footlights, picturesquely habited in a military costume, comprising powdered wigs, three-cornered hats, gold-embroidered blue coats, flesh-coloured tights, and kid top-boots, which dated uncertainly from the Middle Ages. They sang as they crossed their varyingly shapely legs, stamped their feet, and formed into figures no drill-book ever saw, a chorus of which the refrain was—

“Oh it never matters, matters,
Though his coat be tatters, tatters,
His good sword rust-encrusted, and his songs all
sung;
The maids will flatter, flatter,
And his foes will scatter, scatter,
For a soldier is a soldier while his heart is young!”

the last line accompanied by a smiling flirt of their eyes over their shoulders and a kick to the rear as they wheeled, which evoked the unstinted appreciation of the house. The girls had the unvarying pink and white surfaces of their profession, but under it they obviously differed much, and the age and emaciation and ugliness amongst them had its common emphasis in the contrast of their smart masculine attire with the distressingly feminine outlines of their figures. “I should have thought it impossible to make a woman absolutely hideous by a dress that revealed her form,” said Kendal to himself, as the jingling and the dancing and the music went on in the glare before him. “But upon my word!” He paused suddenly. She wasn’t absolutely hideous, that tall girl with the plume and the sword, who

manœuvred always in front of the company—the lieutenant in charge. Indeed, she was comely every way, slight and graceful; and there was a singular strong beauty in her face which was enhanced by the rouge and the powder, and culminated in the laugh in her eyes and upon her lips—a laugh which meant enjoyment, excitement, exhilaration.

It grew upon Kendal that none of the chorus-girls approached Elfrida in the abandon with which they threw themselves into the representation—that all the others were more conscious than she of the wide-hipped incongruity of their *rôle*. To the man who beheld her there in an absolutely new world of light and colour and coarse jest, it seemed that she was perfectly oblivious of any other, and that her personality was the most aggressive, the most ferociously determined to be made the most of on the stage. As the chorus ceased, a half-grown youth remarked to his companion in front, “But the orficer’s the one, Dave! Ain’t she fly!” and the words coming out distinctly in the moment of after-silence, when the applause was over,

set the pit laughing for two or three yards around. Whereat Kendal, with an assortment of feelings which he took small pleasure in analyzing later, got up and went out. People looked up angrily at him as he stumbled over their too-numerous feet in doing so—he was spoiling a solo of some pathos by Mr. Golightly Ticke in the character of a princely refugee, a fur-trimmed mantle and shoes with buckles.

Kendal informed himself with some severity that no possible motive could induce him to make any comment upon Miss Bell to Janet, and found it necessary to go down into Devonshire next day, where his responsibilities had begun to make a direct and persistent attack upon him. It was the first time he had yielded, and he could not help being amused by the remembrance in the train of Elfrida's solemn warning about the danger of his growing typical and going into Parliament. A middle-aged country gentleman, with broad shoulders and a very red neck, occupied the compartment with him, and handled the *Times* as if the privilege of

reading it were one of the few the democratic spirit of the age had left to his class. Kendal scanned him with interest and admiration and pleasure. It was an excellent thing that England's backbone should be composed of men like that, he thought, and he half wished he were not so consciously undeserving of national vertebral honours himself—that Elfrida's warnings had a little more basis of probability. Not that he wanted to drop his work, but a man owed something to his country, especially when he had what they called a stake in it—to establish a home perhaps, to marry, to have children growing up about him. A man had to think of his old age. He told himself that he must be the lightest product of a flippant time, since these things did not occur to him more seriously; and he threw himself into all that had to be done upon "the place," when he arrived at it, with an energy that disposed its real administrators to believe that his ultimate salvation as a landlord was still possible.

He was talking to Janet Cardiff at one of

Lady Halifax's afternoon teas a fortnight later, when their hostess advanced toward them interrogatively.

"While I think of it, Janet," said she, laying a mittened hand on Miss Cardiff's arm, "what has become of your eccentric little American friend? I sent her a card a month ago, and we've neither heard nor seen anything of her."

"Elfrida Bell—oh, she is out of town, Lady Halifax. And I am rather desolate without her—we see so much of her, you know. But she will be back soon—I dare say I will be able to bring her next Thursday. How delicious this coffee is! I shall have another cup, if it keeps me awake for a week! Oh! you got my note about the concert, dear lady?"

Kendal noticed the adroitness of her chatter with amusement. Before she had half finished, Lady Halifax had taken an initial step toward moving off, and Janet's last words received only a nod and a smile for reply.

"You know, then?" said he, when that excellent woman was safely out of earshot.

"Yes, I know," Janet answered, twisting the hanging end of her long-haired boa about her wrist. "I feel as if I oughtn't to; but daddy told me. Daddy went, you know, to try to persuade her to give it up. I *was* so angry with him for doing it. He might have known Elfrida better! And it was such a—such a criticism!"

"I wish you would tell me what you really think," said Kendal, audaciously.

Janet sipped her coffee nervously. "I—I have no right to think," she returned. "I am not in Frida's confidence in the matter; but of course she is perfectly right, from her point of view."

"Ah!" Kendal said, "her point of view!"

Janet looked up at him with a sudden perception of the coldness of his tone. In spite of herself, it gave her keen happiness, until the reflection came that probably he resented her qualification, and turned her heart to lead. She searched her soul for words.

"If she wants to do this thing, she has taken, of course, the only way to do it well.

She does not need any justification—none at all. I wish she were back,” Janet went on desperately, “but only for my own sake—I don’t like being out of it with her—not for any reason connected with what she is doing.”

There was an appreciable pause between them. “Let me put down your cup,” suggested Kendal.

Turning to her again, he said gravely, “I saw Miss Bell at Cheynemouth too.” Janet’s hands trembled as she fastened the fur at her throat. “And I also wish she were back. But my reason is not, I am afraid, so simple as yours.”

“Here is daddy,” Janet answered, “and I know he wants to go. I don’t think my father is looking quite as well as he ought to. He doesn’t complain, but I suspect him of concealed neuralgia. Please give him a lecture on overdoing; it’s the predominant vice of his character!”

CHAPTER XXVI.

ELFRIDA spent five weeks with the Peach Blossom Company on their provincial tour, and in the end the manager was sorry to lose her. He was under the impression that she had joined them as an aspiring novice, presumably able to gratify that or any other whim; he had guessed that she was clever, and could see that she was extremely good looking. Before the month was out he was congratulating himself upon his perception, much as Rattray had a habit of doing, and was quite ready to give Elfrida every encouragement she wanted to embrace the burlesque stage seriously; it was a thundering pity she hadn't voice enough for comic opera. He had nothing to complain of, the arrangement had been for a few weeks only, and had cost him the merest trifle of travelling

expenses; but the day Elfrida went back to town he was inclined to parley with her, to discuss the situation, and to make suggestions for her future plan of action. His attitude of visible regret added another thrill to the joy the girl had in the thought of her undertaking; it marked a point of her success, she thought, at least in so far as preliminaries went. Already as she shrank fastidiously into the corner of a third-class travelling carriage, her project seemed to have reached its original and notable materialization. Chapters passed before her eyes as they do sometimes in dreams, full of charm and beauty; the book went through every phase of comedy and pathos, always ringing true. Little half-formed sentences of admirable art rose before her mind, and she hastily barred them out, feeling that she was not ready yet, and it would be mad misery to want them and to have forgotten them. The thought of what she meant to do possessed her wholly though, and she resigned herself to dreams of the most effective arrangement of her material—the

selection of her publisher, the long midnight hours alone with Buddha, in which she should give herself up to the enthrallment of speaking with that voice which she could summon, that elusive voice which she lived only, only, to be the medium for; that precious voice which would be heard one day—yes, and listened to.

She was so freshly impressed with the new life-lights, curious, tawdry, fascinating, revolting, above all, sharp and undisguised, of the world she had left, that she saw them already projected with a verisimilitude which, if she had possessed the art of it, would have made her indeed famous. Her own power of realization assured her on this point; nobody could see—not divine, but *see* as she did, without being able to reproduce; the one implied the other. She fingered feverishly the strap of the little hand-bag in her lap, and satisfied herself by unlocking it with a key that hung on a string inside her jacket. It had two or three photographs of the women she knew among the company, another of herself in her stage uniform, a bill of the play, her

powder and rouge box, a scrap of gold lace, a young Jew's letter full of blots and devotion, a rather vulgar sapphire bracelet, some artificial flowers and a quantity of slips of paper of all sizes covered with her own enigmatically rounded handwriting. She put her hand in carefully and searched; everything was there, and up from the bag came a scent that made her shut her eyes and laugh with its power to bring her experiences back to her. She locked it carefully again with a quivering sigh; after all, she would not have many hours to wait. Presently an idea came to her that she thought worth keeping, and she thrust her hand into her pocket for paper and pencil. She drew out a crumpled oblong scrap and wrote on the back of it, then unlocked the bag again and put it carefully in. Before it had been only the cheque of the *Illustrated Age* for a fortnight's work, now it was the record of something valuable.

The train rolled into a black and echoing station as the light in the carriage began to turn from the uncertain greyness that came

in at the window to the uncertain yellowness that descended from the roof. Boys ran up and down the length of the platform in the foggy gaslit darkness shouting Banbury cakes and newspapers. Elfrida hated Banbury cakes, but she had a consuming hunger and bought some. She also hated English newspapers, but lately some queer new notable Australian things had been appearing in the *St. George's Gazette*—Cardiff had sent them to her—and she selected this journal from the damp lot that hung over the newsboy's arm, on the chance of a fresh one. The doors were locked and the train hurried on. Elfrida ate two of her Banbury cakes with the malediction that only this British confection can inspire, and bestowed the rest upon a small boy who eyed her enviously over the back of an adjoining seat. She and the small boy and his mother had the carriage to themselves.

There was nothing from the unusual Australian contributor in this number of the *St. George's*, and Elfrida turned its pages with the bored feeling of knowing what else she might expect. "Parliamentary

Debates," of course, and the news of London ; five lines from America announcing the burning of a New York hotel, with hideous loss of life ; an article on the situation in Persia, and one on the cultivation of artichokes ; " Money," " The Seer of Hawarden," the foreign markets, book reviews. Elfrida thought also that she knew what she might expect here, and that it would be nothing very absorbing. Still, with a sense of tasting criticism in advance, she let her eye travel over the column or two of the paper devoted to three or four books of the week. A moment later Janet Cardiff's name in the second paragraph had sprung at her throat, it seemed to Elfrida, and choked her.

She could not see—she could not see ! The print was so bad, the light was infernal, the carriage jolted so ! She got up and held the paper nearer to the lamp in the roof, staying herself against the end of a seat. As she read, she grew paler, and the paper shook in her hand. " One of the books of the year," " showing grasp of character and keen dramatic instinct," " a distinctly original

vein," "too slender a plot for perfect symmetry, but a treatment of situation at once nervous and strong," were some of the commonplaces that said themselves over and over again in her mind as she sank back into her place by the window with the paper lying across her lap.

Her heart beat furiously, her head was in a whirl, she stared hard for calmness into the swift-passing night outside. Presently she recognized herself to be angry with an intense, still, jealous anger that seemed to rise and consume her in every part of her being. A success—of course it would be a success if Janet wrote it—she was not artistic enough to fail. Ah, should Janet's friend go so far as to say that? She didn't know—she would think afterwards; but Janet was of those who succeed, and there were more ways than one of deserving success. Janet was a compromise; she belonged really to the British public, and the class of Academy studies from the nude, which were always draped, just a little. Elfrida found a bitter satisfaction in this

simile, and elaborated it. The book would be one to be commended for *jeunes filles*, and her lips turned down mockingly in the shadow. She fancied some well-meaning critic saying, "It should be on every drawing-room table," and she almost laughed outright. She thought of a number of other little things that might be said, of the same nature, and equally amusing. Her anger flamed up again at the thought of how Janet had concealed this ambition from her, had made her, in a way, the victim of it. It was not fair, not fair! She could have prepared herself against it—she might have got *her* book ready sooner, and its triumph might at least have come out side by side with Janet's. She was just beginning to feel that they were neck and neck, in a way, and now Janet had shot so far ahead, in a night, in a paragraph! She could never, never catch up! And from under her closed eyelids two hot tears started and ran over her cold cheeks. It came upon her suddenly that she was sick with jealousy, not envy, but pure anger at being distanced,

and she tried to attack herself about it. With a strong effort, she heaped opprobrium and shame upon herself, denounced herself, tried to hate herself. But she felt that it was all a kind of dumb show, and that under it nothing could change the person she was, or the real feeling she had about this—nothing except *being first*! Ah, then she could be generous, and loyal, and disinterested—then she could be really a nice person to know, she derided herself. And as her foot touched the little hand-bag on the floor, she took a kind of sullen courage, which deserted her when she folded the paper on her lap, and was struck again in the face with Lash and Black's advertisement on the outside page, announcing Janet's novel in letters, that looked half a foot long. Then she resigned herself to her wretchedness, till the train sped into the glare of Paddington.

"I hope you're not bad, miss," remarked the small boy's mother as they pushed toward the door together. "Them Banburys don't agree with everybody."

The effect upon Elfrida was hysterical. She controlled herself just long enough to answer with decent gravity, and escaped upon the platform to burst into a silent, quivering paroxysm of laughter that brought her over-charged feelings delicious relief, and produced an answering smile on the face of a large good-looking policeman. Her laugh rested her, calmed her, and restored something of her moral tone. She was at least able to resist the temptation of asking the boy at the book-stall where she bought "John Camberwell" whether the volume was selling rapidly or not. Buddha looked on askance while she read it, all night long, and well into the morning. She reached the last page and flung down the book in pure physical exhaustion, with the framework of half a dozen reviews in her mind. When she awoke, at two in the afternoon, she decided that she must have another day or two of solitude—she would not let the Cardiffs know she had returned quite yet.

Three days afterwards the *Illustrated Age* published a review of "John Camberwell,"

which brought an agreeable perplexity to Messrs. Lash and Black. It was too good to compress, and their usual advertising space would not contain it all. It was almost passionately appreciative; here and there the effect of the criticism was obviously marred by the desire of the writer to let no point of beauty or of value escape divination. Quotations from the book were culled like flowers, with a delicate hand; and there was conspicuous care in the avoidance of any phrase that was hackneyed, any line of criticism that custom had impoverished. It seemed that the writer fashioned a tribute, and strove to make it perfect in every way. And so perfect it was, so cunningly devised and gracefully expressed, with such a self-conscious beauty of word and thought, that its extravagance went unsuspected and the interest it provoked was its own.

Janet read the review in a glow of remorseful affection. She was appealed to less by the exquisite manipulation with which the phrases strove to say the most and the best, than by the loyal haste to praise she saw

behind them, and she forgave their lack of blame, in the happy belief that Elfrida had not the heart for it. She was not in the least angry that her friend should have done her the injustice of what would have been, less adroitly managed, indiscriminate praise ; in fact, she hardly thought of the value of the critique at all, so absorbed was she in the sweet sense of the impulse that made Elfrida write it. To Janet's quick forgiveness, it made up for everything, indeed she found in it a scourge for her anger, for her resentment. Elfrida might do what she pleased, Janet would never cavil again ; she was sure now of some real possession in her friend. But she longed to see Elfrida, to assure herself of the warm verity of this. Besides, she wanted to feel her work in her friend's presence, to extract the censure that was due, to take the essence of praise from her eyes, and voice, and hand. But she would wait. She had still no right to know that Elfrida had returned, and an odd sensitiveness prevented her from driving instantly to Essex Court to ask.

The next day passed and the next. Lawrence Cardiff found no reason to share his daughter's scruples, and went twice, to meet Mrs. Jordan on the threshold with the implacable statement that Miss Bell had returned, but was not at home. He found it impossible to mention Elfrida to Janet now.

Kendal had gone back to Devonshire to look after the thinning of a bit of his woodlands—one thing after another claimed his attention there. Janet had a gay note from him now and then, always *en camerade*, in which he deplored himself in the character of an intelligent landowner; but in which she detected also a growing interest and satisfaction in all that he was finding to do. Janet saw it always with a throb of pleasure; his art was much to her, but the sympathy that bound him to the practical side of his world was more, though she would not have confessed it. She was unconsciously comforted by the sense that it was on the warm, bright, comprehensible side of his interest in life that she touched him, and that Elfrida

did not touch him. The idea of the country house in Devonshire excluded Elfrida, and it was an exclusion Janet could be happy in conscientiously, since Elfrida did not care.

CHAPTER XXVII.

EVEN in view of her popular magazine articles and her literary name, Janet's novel was a surprising success. There is no reason why we should follow the example of all the London critics, except Elfrida Bell, and go into the detail of its slender story and its fairly original, broadly human qualities of treatment to explain this; the fact will perhaps be accepted without demonstration. It was a common phrase among the reviewers, though Messrs. Lash and Black carefully cut it out of their selections for advertisement, that the book was in no way remarkable; and the publishers were as much astonished as anybody else when the first edition was exhausted in three weeks. Yet the agreeable fact remained that the reviews gave it the amount

of space usually assigned to books allowed to be remarkable; and that the *Athenian* announced the second edition to be had "at all booksellers" on a certain Monday.

"When they say it is not remarkable," wrote Kendal to Janet, "they mean that it is not heroic; and that it is published in one volume, at six shillings. To be remarkable—to the trade—it should have dealt with epic passion, in three volumes, at thirty."

To him the book had a charm quite apart from its literary value, in the revelation it made of its author. It was the first piece of work Janet had done from a seriously artistic point of view, into which she had thrown herself without fence or guard; and it was, to him, as if she had stepped from behind a mask. He wrote to her about it with the confidence of the new relation it established between them; he looked forward with warm pleasure to the closer intimacy which it would bring. To Janet, living in this new sweetness of their better understanding, only one thing was lacking—

Elfrida made no sign. If Janet could have known, it was impossible. In her review, Elfrida had done all she could. She had forced herself to write it before she touched a line of her own work; and now, persistently remote in her attic, she strove every night over the pile of notes which represented the ambition that sent its roots daily deeper into the fibre of her being. Twice she made up her mind to go to Kensington Square, and found she could not; the last time being the day the *Decade* said that a new and larger edition of "John Camberwell" was in preparation.

Ten days after her return, the maid at Kensington Square, with a curious look, brought up Elfrida's card to Janet. Miss Bell was in the drawing-room, she said. Yes, she had told Miss Bell Miss Cardiff was up in the library; but Miss Bell said she would wait in the drawing-room.

Janet looked at the card in astonishment, debating with herself what it might mean. Such a formality was absurd between them! Why had not Elfrida come up at once to

this third-story den of theirs she knew so well? What new preposterous caprice was this? She went down gravely, chilled; but before she reached the drawing-room she resolved to take it another way—as a whim, as a matter for scolding. After all, she was glad Elfrida had come back to her on any terms. She went in radiant, with a quick step, holding the card at arm's length.

“To what,” she demanded mockingly, “am I to attribute the honour of this visit?” But she seized Elfrida lightly, and kissed her on both cheeks, before it was possible for her to reply.

The girl disengaged herself gently. “Oh, I have come, like the rest, to lay my homage at your feet,” she said, with a little smile that put spaces between them. “You did not expect me to deny myself that pleasure?”

“Don't be absurd, Frida. When did you come back to town?”

“When did I come back?” Elfrida repeated slowly, watching for the effect of her words. “On the first, I think it was.”

“And this is the tenth!” Janet exclaimed,

adding helplessly, "You *are* an enigma! Why didn't you let me know?"

"How could I suppose that you would care to know anything just now—except what the papers tell you?"

Janet regarded her silently, saying nothing. Under her look Elfrida's expression changed a little, grew uncomfortable. The elder girl felt the chill, the seriousness with which she received the card upstairs, return upon her suddenly; and she became aware that she could not, with self-respect, fight it any longer.

"If you thought that," she said gravely, "it was a curious thing to think. But I believe I am indebted to you for one of the pleasantest things the papers have been telling me," she went on with constraint. "It was very kind—much too kind. Thank you very much."

Elfrida looked up, half frightened, at the revulsion of her tone. "But—but your book is delightful. I was no more charmed than everybody must be. And it has made a tremendous hit, hasn't it?"

“Thanks, I believe it is doing a fair amount of credit to its publishers. They are very pushing people.”

“How delicious it must feel!” Elfrida said. Her words were more like those of their ordinary relation, but her tone and manner had the aloofness of the merest acquaintance.

Janet felt a slow anger grow up in her. It was intolerable, this dictation of their relation. Elfrida desired a change. She should have it, but not at her caprice. Janet’s innate dominance rose up, and asserted a superior right to make the terms between them; and all the hidden jar, the unacknowledged contempt, the irritation, the hurt and the stress of the year that had passed, rushed in from banishment and gained possession of her. She took just an appreciable instant to steady herself, and then her grey eyes regarded Elfrida with a calm remoteness in them which gave the other girl a quick impression of having done more than she meant to do, gone too far to return. Their glances met, and Elfrida’s eyes, un-

quiet and undecided, dropped before Janet's. Already she had a vibrant regret.

"You enjoyed being out of town, of course?" Janet said. "It is always pleasant to leave London for a while, I think."

There was a cool masterfulness in the tone of this that arrested Elfrida's feeling of half-penitence, and armed her instantly. Whatever desire she had felt to assert and indulge her individuality at any expense, in her own attitude there had been the consciousness of what they owed one another. She had defied it perhaps, but it had been there. In this it was ignored; Janet had gone a step further—her tone expressed the blankest indifference. Elfrida drew herself up.

"Thanks, it was delightful. An escape from London always is, as you say. Unfortunately, one is obliged to come back."

Janet laughed lightly. "Oh, I don't know that I go so far as that. I rather like coming back, too. And you have missed one or two things, you know, by being away."

"The Lord Mayor's show?" asked Elfrida,

angry that she could not restrain the curl of her lip.

“Oh dear no! That comes off in November, don’t you remember? Things at the theatres chiefly. Oh, Jessie, Jessie!” she went on, shaking her head at the maid, who had come in with the tray. “You’re a quarter of an hour late with tea. Make it for us now where you are, and, remember that Miss Bell doesn’t like cream.”

The maid blushed, and smiled under the easy reproof and did as she was told. Janet chatted on pleasantly about the one or two first nights she had seen, and Elfrida felt for a moment that the situation was hopelessly changed. She had an intense, unreasonable indignation. The maid had scarcely left the room when her blind search for means of retaliation succeeded.

“But one is not wholly without diversions in the provinces. I had, for instance, the pleasure of a visit from Mr. Cardiff.”

“Oh yes, I heard of that,” Janet returned, smiling. “My father thought that we were being improperly robbed of your

society, and went to try to persuade you to return, didn't he! I told him I thought it was a shocking liberty; but you ought to forgive him—on the ground of his disappointment."

The cup Elfrida held shook in its saucer, and she put it down to silence it. Janet did not know, did not suspect, then. Well, she should. Her indifference was too maddening.

"Under the circumstances, it was not a liberty at all. Mr. Cardiff wanted me to come back to marry him."

There, it was done, and as brutally as possible. Her vanity was avenged—she could have her triumphs too! And instant with its gratification came the cold recoil of herself upon herself—a sense of shame, a longing to undo.

Janet took the announcement with the very slightest lifting of her eyebrows. She bent her head and stirred her teacup meditatively, then looked gravely at Elfrida.

"Really," she said. "And may I ask—whether you *have* come back for that?"

“I—I hardly know,” Elfrida faltered. “You know what I think about marriage—there is so much to consider.”

“Doubtless?” Janet returned. Her head was throbbing with the question why this girl would not go—go—*go*! How had she the hardihood to stay another instant? At any moment her father might come in, and then how could she support the situation? But all she added was, “I am afraid it is a matter which we cannot very well discuss.” Then a bold thought came to her, and without weighing it, she put it into words. The answer might put everything definitely—so definitely—at an end. “Mr. Kendal went to remonstrate with you, too, didn’t he? It must have been very troublesome, and embarrassing——” Janet stopped.

Elfrida had turned paler, and her eyes gteatened with excitement. “*No*,” she said, “I did not see Mr. Kendal. What do you mean? Tell me!”

“Perhaps I have no right; but he told me that he had seen you at Cheynemouth.”

“He must have been in the audience,”

Elfrida returned in a voice that was hardly audible.

“Perhaps.”

For a moment there was silence between them—a natural silence, and no dumbness. They had forgotten about themselves in the absorption of other thoughts.

“I must go,” Elfrida said with an effort, rising. What had come to her with this thing Janet had told her? Why had she this strange fulness in the beating of her heart; this sense—part of shame, part of fright, part of happiness—that had taken possession of her? What had become of her strange feeling about Janet? For it had gone, gone utterly, and with it all her pride, all her self-control. She was conscious only of a great need of somebody’s strength; of somebody’s thought and interest—of Janet’s. Yet how could she unsay anything? She held out her hand, and Janet took it. “Good-bye, then,” she said.

“Good-bye! I hope you will escape the rain.”

But at the door Elfrida turned and came

back. Janet was mechanically stirring the coals in the grate.

"Listen!" she said. "I want to tell you something about myself."

Janet looked up with inward impatience. She knew these repentant self-revealings so well.

"I know I'm a beast—I can't help it! Ever since I heard of your success I've been hating it. You can laugh if you like, but I've been *jealous*. Oh, I'm not deceived! Very well we are acquainted, myself and I! It's pure jealousy—I admit it! I despise it; but there it is. You have everything! You succeed in *all* the things you do—you suffocate me, do you understand? *Always* the first place; always the attention, the consideration, wherever we go together! And your pretence—your *lie*—of believing my work as good as yours! I believe it—yes, I do—but you *do not*! Oh, I know you through and through, Janet Cardiff! And altogether," she went on passionately, "it has been too much for me. I have not been able to govern it. I have yielded—*misérable*

that I am! But just now I feel it going away from me, Janet."

She paused, but there was no answer. Janet was looking contemplatively into the fire.

"And I made up my mind to say it straight out. It is better so, don't you think?"

"Oh yes; it is better so."

"I hate you sometimes—when you suffocate me with your cleverness; but I admire you *tremendously* always. So I suppose we can go on, can't we? Ah!" Elfrida cried, noting Janet's hesitation with a kind of wonder. How should it be exacted of her to be anything more than frank? "I will go a step further to come back to you, my Janet. I will tell you a secret—the first one I ever had. Don't be afraid that I shall become your stepmother, and hate me in advance. That is too absurd!" and the girl laughed ringingly, "because—I believe I'm in love with John Kendal!"

For answer, Janet turned to her with the look of one pressed to the last extremity.

"Is it true that you are going to write your own experiences in the *corps de ballet*?" she asked ironically.

"Quite true. I have done three chapters already. What do you think of it? Isn't it a good idea?"

"Do you really want to know?"

"Of course."

"I think," said Janet, slowly, looking into the fire, "that the scheme is a contemptible one; and that you are doing a very poor sort of thing in carrying it out."

"Thanks!" Elfrida returned. "We are pretty much alike, we women, aren't we, after all? Only some of us say so, and some of us don't. But I shouldn't have thought you would have objected to my small rivalry *before the fact*."

Janet sighed wearily, and looked out of the window. "Let me lend you an umbrella," she said; "the rain has come."

"It won't be necessary, thanks," Elfrida returned. "I hear Mr. Cardiff coming upstairs. I shall ask him to take care of me as far as the omnibuses. Good-bye!"

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“Oh, but—but,” cried Elfrida, tragic-eyed, “you don’t understand, my friend; and these pretences of mine are unendurable—I won’t make another! This is the real reason why I can’t go to your house. Janet knows—everything there is to know. I told her—I myself—in a fit of rage ten days ago, and then she said things, and I said things, and—and there is nothing now between us any more!”

Lawrence Cardiff looked grave. “I am sorry for that,” he said.

A middle-aged gentleman in apparently hopeless love does not confide in his grown-up daughter, and Janet’s father had hardly thought of her seriously in connection with the new relation which was to him so precarious and so sweet. Its realization had

never been close enough for practical considerations—it was an image, something in the clouds; and if he still hoped and longed for its materialization, there were times when he feared even to regard it too closely lest it should vanish. His first thought at this announcement of Elfrida's was of what it might signify of change, what bearing it had upon her feeling, upon her intention. Then he thought of its immediate results, which seemed to him unfortunate; but in the instant he had for reflection he did not consider Janet at all.

“Ah, yes! It was *contemptible*! I did it partly to hurt her and partly, I think, to gratify my own vanity. You would not have thought anything so bad of me perhaps?” She looked up at him childishly.

They were strolling about the quiet spaces of the Temple Courts. It was a pleasant afternoon in February, the new grass was pushing up. They could be quite occupied with one another—they had the place almost to themselves. Elfrida's well-fitting, shabby little jacket hung unbuttoned, and she

swung Cardiff's light walking-stick as they sauntered. He, with his eyes on her delicately flushed face, and his hands unprofessionally in his pockets, was counting the minutes that were left them.

"You wouldn't have, would you?" she persisted.

"I would think any womanly fault you like of you," he laughed, "but one—the fear to confess it."

Elfrida shut her lips with a little proud smile. "Do you know," she said confidently, "when you say things like that to me, I like you very much—but *very much!*"

"But not enough," he answered her quickly—"never enough, Frida?"

The girl's expression changed. "You are not to call me Frida," she said, frowning a little. "It has an association that will always be painful to me. When people—disappoint me, I try to forget them in every way I can." She paused, and Cardiff saw that her eyes were full of tears.

He had an instant of intense resentment against his daughter. What brutality had

she been guilty of toward Elfrida in that moment of unreasonable jealousy that surged up between them? He would fiercely like to know. But Elfrida was smiling again, looking up at him in wilful disregard of her wet eyes.

“Say Elfrida, please—all of it.”

They had reached the Inner Temple Hall.

“Let us go in there and sit down,” he suggested. “You must be tired, dear child.”

She hesitated and submitted. “Yes, I am,” she said. Presently they were sitting on one of the long dark polished wooden benches in the quiet of the rich light the ages have left in this place, keeping a mutual moment of silence. “How splendid it is!” Elfrida said restlessly, looking at the great carved wooden screen they had come through. “The man who did that had a joy in his life, hadn’t he? To-day is very cheap and common, don’t you think?”

He had hardly words to answer her vague question, so absorbed was he in the beauty and the grace and the interest with which she had suddenly invested the high-backed

corner she sat in. He felt no desire to analyze her charm—he did not ask himself whether it was the poetry of her eyes and lips or her sincerity about herself, or the joy in art that was the key to her soul, or all of these or something that was none of them. He simply allowed himself to be possessed by it, and Elfrida saw his pleasure in his eager look and in every line of his delicate features. It was delicious to be able to give such pleasure, she thought. She felt like a thrice-spiritualized Hebe lifting the cup, not to Jove, but to a very superior mortal. She wished, in effect, as she looked at him, that he were of her essence—she might be cup-bearer to him always then. It was a graceful and un-exacting occupation. But he was not, absolutely, and the question was, how long—She started as he seemed to voice her thought.

“This can’t go on, Elfrida.”

Cardiff had somehow possessed himself of her hand as it lay along the polished edge of the wooden seat. It was a privilege

she permitted him sometimes, with the tacit understanding that he was not to abuse it.

“And why not—for a little while? It is very pleasant, I think.”

“If you were in love you would know why. You are not, I know; you needn’t say so. But it will come, Elfrida—only give it the chance. I would stake my soul on the certainty of being able to make you love me.” His confidence in the power of his own passion was as strong as a boy’s of twenty.

“If I were in love!” Elfrida repeated slowly, with an absent smile. “And you think it would come afterwards? That is an exploded idea, my friend. I should feel as if I were acting out an old-fashioned novel—an old-fashioned, *second-rate* novel!”

She looked at him with eyes that invited him to share their laughter; but the smile he gave her was pitiful, if she could have known it. The strain she had been putting upon him, and promised indefinitely to put upon him, was growing greater than he could bear.

"I am afraid I must ask you to decide," he said. "You have been telling me two things, dear—one thing with your lips, and another thing with your eyes, and ways of doing. You tell me that I must go, but you make it possible for me to stay. For God's sake, let it be one or the other."

"I am so sorry. We could be friends of a sort, I think, but I can't marry you."

"You have never told me why."

"Shall I tell you truly, literally — brutally?"

"Of course."

"Then it is not only because I don't love you—that there is not for me the common temptation to enter a form of bondage which as I see it is hateful. That is enough, but it is not all; it is not even the principal thing! It is——" she hesitated; "it is that—that we are different, you and I. It would be preposterous," she went on hastily, "not to admit that you are infinitely superior—of course—and cleverer and wiser and more important in the world. And that

will make me absurd in your eyes, when I tell you that my whole life is wrapped up in a sense which I cannot see or feel that you have at all. You have much—oh, a great deal—outside of it, and I have nothing. My life is swayed in obedience to laws that you do not even know of. You can hardly be my friend—completely. As your wife I should suffer, and you would suffer, in a false position which could never be altered.”

She paused and looked at him seriously; and he felt that she believed what she had said. She had, at all events, given him full permission to go. And he was as far from being able to avail himself of it as he had been before; further, for every moment those slender fingers rested in his made it more impossible to relinquish them for always. So he persisted, with a bitter sense of failure that would not wholly, honestly recognize itself.

“Is Golightly Ticke your friend—completely?”

“More—pardon me—than you could ever

be," she answered him, undaunted by the contempt in his tone.

There was silence for a moment between them. Elfrida's wide-eyed gaze wandered appreciatively over the dusky interior, which for the man beside her barely existed.

"What a lot of English character there is here!" she said softly. "How dignified it is, and conscientious, and restrained!"

It was as if she had not spoken. Cardiff stared with knit brows into the insoluble problem she had presented to him a moment longer.

"*How* are we so different, Elfrida?" he broke out passionately. "You are a woman, and I am a man; the world has dealt with us differently, and I am older than I dare say I ought to be to hope for your love; but these are not differences that count, whatever their results may be. It seems to me trivial to speak of such things in this connection; but we like very much the same books—the same people. I grant you I don't know anything about pictures—but surely," he pleaded, "these are not the

things that cut a man off from the happiness of a lifetime."

"I'm afraid——" she began, and then she broke off suddenly. "I *am* sorry—sorrrier than I have ever been before, I think. I should have liked so well to keep your friendship; it is the most chivalrous I know. But if you feel like—like this about it, I suppose I must not. Shall we say good-bye here, and now? Truly I am sorry."

She had risen, and he could find no words to stay her. It seemed that the battle to possess her was over, and that he had lost. Her desire for his friendship had all the mockery of freedom in it to him; in the agony of the moment it insulted him. With an effort he controlled himself—there should be no more futility of words. He must see the last of her some time—let it be now, then. He bent his head over the slender hand he held, brought his lips to it, and then, with passion, kissed it hotly again and again, seeking the warm uncovered little spot above the fastening. Elfrida snatched it away with a little shiver at the contact, a little

angry shiver of surprised nerves. He looked at her piteously, struggling for a word, for any word to send away her repulsion, to bring her back to the mood of the moment before. But he could not find it—he seemed to have drifted hopelessly from her, lost all his reckonings.

“Well?” she said. She was held there partly by her sense of pity, and partly by her desire to see the last, the very last of it.

“Go!” he returned, with a shrinking of pain at the word; “I cannot.”

“*Pauvre ami!*” she said softly, and then she turned, and her light steps sounded back to him through the length of the hall.

She walked more slowly when she reached the pavement outside, and one who met her might have thought she indulged in a fairly pleasant reverie. A little smile curved about the corners of her mouth, half compassionate, half amused and triumphant. She had barely time to banish it, when she heard Cardiff’s step beside her, and his voice.

“I had to come after you,” he said; “I’ve let you carry off my stick!”

She looked at him in mischievous challenge of his subterfuge, and he added frankly, with a voice that shook a little notwithstanding—

“It’s of no use. I find I must accept your compromise. It is very good of you to be willing to make one. And I can’t let you go altogether, Elfrida.”

She gave him a happy smile. “And now,” she said, “shall we talk of something else?”

CHAPTER XXIX.

MARCH brought John Kendal back to town with a few Devonshire studies, and a kindling discontent with the three subjects he had in hand for the May exhibitions. It spread over everything he had done for the last six months, when he found himself alone with his canvases and whole-hearted toward them. He recognized that he had been dividing his interest, that his ambition had suffered, that his hand did not leap as it had before at the suggestion of some lyric or dramatic possibility of colour. He even fancied that his drawing, which was his vulnerable point, had worsened. He worked strenuously for days without satisfying himself that he had recovered ground appreciably, and then came desperately to the conclusion that he wanted the stimulus of a new idea, a subject

altogether disassociated from anything he had done. It was only, he felt, when his spirit was wholly in bondage to the charm of his work that he could do it well, and he needed to be bound afresh. Literally, he told himself, the only thing he had painted in months that pleased him was that mere sketch from memory of the Halifax drawing-room episode. He dragged it out and looked at it, under its damaging red stripes, with enthusiasm. Whatever she did with herself, he thought, Elfrida Bell was curiously satisfying from an artistic point of view. He fell into a train of meditation which quickened presently into a practical idea that sent him striding up and down the room.

“I believe she would be delighted,” he said aloud, coming to a sudden standstill; “and by Jove! it would be a kind of reparation!”

He delved into an abysmal cupboard for a crusted pen and a cobwebby bottle of ink, and was presently sitting among the fragments of three notes addressed, one

after the other, to "Dear Miss Bell." In the end he wrote a single line without any formality whatever, and when Elfrida opened it an hour later, she read—

"Will you let me paint your portrait for the Academy?"

"JOHN KENDAL.

"P.S.—Or any other exhibition you may prefer."

The last line was a stroke of policy. "She abhors Burlington House," he had reflected.

The answer came next day, and he tore it open with rapid fingers. "I can't think why; but if you wish it, yes. But why not for the Academy, since you are disposed to do me that honour?"

"Characteristic!" thought Kendal, grinning, as he tore up the note. "She can't think why! But I'm glad the Academy doesn't stick in her pretty throat; I was afraid it would. It's the potent influence of the Private View."

He wrote immediately in joyful gratitude

to make an appointment for the next day, went to work vigorously about his preparations, and when he had finished, smoked a series of pipes to calm the turbulence of his anticipations. As a neighbouring clock struck five he put on his coat. Janet must know about this new idea of his; he longed to tell her, to talk about it over the old-fashioned Spode cup of tea she would give him—Janet was a connoisseur in tea. He realized as he went downstairs how much of the pleasure of his life was centering in these occasional afternoon gossips with her, in the mingled delight of her interest and the fragrance and the comfort of that half-hour over the Spode teacup. The association brought him a reminiscence that sent him smiling to the nearest confectioner's shop, where he ordered a supply of Italian cakes, for that would make ample provision for the advent of half a dozen unexpected visitors to the studio. He would have to do his best with afternoon sittings; Elfrida was not available in the morning, and he thought compassionately that his sitter must not be

starved. "I will feed her first," he thought ironically, remembering her keen childish enjoyment of sugared things. "She will pose all the better for some tea," and he walked on to Kensington Square.

CHAPTER XXX.

“JANET,” said Lawrence Cardiff a week later at breakfast, “the Halifaxes have decided upon their American tour. I saw Lady Halifax last night, and she tells me they sail on the twenty-first. They want you to go with them. Do you feel disposed to do it?”

Mr. Cardiff looked at his daughter with eyes from which the hardness that entered them weeks before in the Temple Courts had never quite disappeared. His face was worn and thin, its delicacy had sharpened, and he carried about with him an habitual abstraction. Janet, regarding him day after day in the light of her secret knowledge, gave herself up to an inward storm of anger and grief and anxiety. Elfrida's name had

been tacitly dropped between them, but to Janet's sensitiveness she was constantly and painfully to be reckoned with in their common life. Lawrence Cardiff's moods were unaccountable to his daughter except by Elfrida's influence. She noticed bitterly that his old evenness of temper, the gay placidity that made so delightful a basis for their joint happiness, had absolutely disappeared. Instead she found her father either irritable or despondent, or inspired by a gaiety which she had no hand in producing, and which took no account of her. That was the real pain; Janet was keenly distressed at the little drama of suffering that unfolded itself daily before her, but her disapproval of its cause very much blunted her sense of its seriousness. She had besides, a grown-up daughter's repulsion and impatience for a parental love affair, and it is doubtful whether she would have brought her father's to a happy conclusion without a very severe struggle, if she had possessed the power to do it. But this exclusion gave her a keener pang. She

had shared so much with him before, had been so important to him always! And now he could propose with perfect equanimity that she should go to America with the Halifaxes.

"But you could not get away by the twenty-first," she returned, trying to take it for granted that the idea included him.

"Oh, I don't propose going," Mr. Cardiff returned from behind his newspaper.

"But daddy, they intend to be away for a year."

"About that. Lady Halifax has arranged a capital itinerary. They mean to come back by India."

"And pray what would become of you all by yourself for a year, sir?" asked Janet, brightly. "Besides, we were always going to do that trip together." She had a stubborn inward determination not to recognize this difference that had sprung up between them. It was only a phase, she told herself, of her father's miserable feeling just now; it would last another week, another fortnight, and then things would be as they had been

before. She would not let herself believe in it, hurt as it might.

Mr. Cardiff lowered his paper. "Don't think of that," he said over the top of it. "There is really no occasion. I shall get on very well. There is always the club, you know, and this is an opportunity you ought not to miss."

Janet said nothing, and Lawrence Cardiff went back to his newspaper. She tried to go on with her breakfast, but scalding tears stood in her eyes, and she could not swallow. She was unable to command herself far enough to ask to be excused; and she rose abruptly and left the room with her face turned carefully away.

Cardiff followed her with his eyes, and gave an uncomprehending shrug. He looked at his watch; there was still half an hour before he need leave the house. It brought him an uncomfortable thought that he might go and comfort Janet; it was evident that something he had said had hurt her. She was growing absurdly hypersensitive. He dismissed the idea—Heaven only knew into

what complications it might lead them. He spent the time instead in a restless walk up and down the room, revolving whether Elfrida Bell would or would not be brought to reconsider her refusal to let him take her to "Faust," that night—he never could depend upon her.

Janet had not seen John Kendal since the afternoon he came to her, radiant with his intention of putting all of Elfrida's charm upon canvas, full of its intrinsic difficulties, eager for her sympathy, depending on her enthusiastic interest. She had disappointed him; she did her best, but the sympathy and enthusiasm and interest would not come. She could not tell him why; her broken friendship was still sacred to her for what it had been. Besides, explanations were impossible. So she listened and approved with a strained smile, and led him, with a persistence he did not understand, to talk of other things. He went away, chilled and baffled, and he had not come again. She knew that he was painting with every nerve tense and eager, in oblivion of all but his work

and the face that inspired it. Elfrida, he told her, was to give him three sittings a week of an hour each, and he complained of the scantiness of the dole. She could conjure up those hours, all too short for his delight in his model and his work. Surely it would not be long now ; Elfrida cared, by her own confession. Janet felt dully there could now be no doubt of that ; and since Elfrida cared, what could be more certain than the natural issue ? She fought with herself to accept it, she spent hours in seeking for the indifference that might come of accustoming herself to the fact. And when she thought of her father, she hoped it might be soon.

There came a day when Lawrence Cardiff gave his daughter the happiness of being almost his other self again. He had come downstairs with a headache and a touch of fever, and all day long he let her take care of him submissively, with the old pleasant gratitude that seemed to re-establish their comradeship. She had a joyful, secret wonder at the change, it was so sudden and so complete ; but their sympathetic relation

reasserted itself naturally and at once, and she would not let herself question it. In the evening he sent her to his room for a book of his, and when she brought it to him, where he lay upon the lounge in the library, he detained her a moment.

“You mustn’t attempt to read without a lamp now, daddy,” she said, touching his forehead lightly with her lips; “you will damage your poor old eyes.”

“Don’t be impertinent about my poor old eyes, miss,” he returned, smiling. “Janet, there is something I think you ought to know.”

“Yes, daddy.” The girl felt herself turning rigid.

“I want you to make friends with Elfrida again. I have every reason to believe—at all events some reason to believe—that she will become my wife.”

Her knowing already made it simpler to say, “Has—has she promised daddy?”

“Not exactly; but I think she will in the end, Janet.” His tone was very confident. “And of course you must forgive each other

any little heart-burnings there may have been between you."

Any little heart-burnings! Janet had a quivering moment of indecision. "Oh, daddy! she won't! she won't!" she cried tumultuously, and hurried out of the room.

Cardiff lay still, smiling pityingly. What odd ideas women managed to get into their heads about one another! Janet thought Elfrida would refuse her overtures if she made them. How little she knew Elfrida—his just, candid, generous Elfrida!

Janet flung herself upon her bed and faced the situation, dry-eyed, with burning cheeks. She could always face a situation when it admitted the possibility of anything being done, when there was a chance for resolution and action. Practical difficulties nerved her; it was only before the blankness of a problem of pure abstractness that she quailed, such a problem as the complication of her relation to John Kendal and to Elfrida Bell. She had shrunk from that for months; had put it away habitually in the furthest corner of her consciousness, and

had done her best to make it stay there. She discovered how sore its fret had been only with the relief she felt when she simplified it at a stroke that afternoon on which everything came to an end between her and Elfrida. Since the burden of obligation their relation imposed had been removed, Janet had analyzed her friendship, and had found it wanting in many ways to which she had been wilfully blind before. The criticism she had always silenced came forward and spoke boldly; and she recognized the impossibility of a whole-hearted intimacy where a need for enforced dumbness existed. All the girl's charm she acknowledged with a heart wrung by the thought that it was no longer for her. She dwelt separately and long upon Elfrida's keen sense of justice; her impulsive generosity; her refined consideration for other people; the delicacy of some of her personal instincts; her absolute sincerity toward herself and the world; her passionate exaltation of what was to her the ideal in art. Janet exacted from herself the last jot of justice toward Elfrida in all these

things ; and then she listened, as she had not done before, to the voice that spoke to her from the very depths of her being, it seemed, and said, “ Nevertheless, *no !* ” She only half comprehended, and the words brought her a sadness that would be long, she knew, in leaving her ; but she listened and agreed.

And now it seemed to her that she must ignore it again ; that the wise, the necessary, the expedient thing to do was to go to Elfrida and re-establish, if she could, the old relation, cost what it might. She must take up her burden of obligation again in order that it might be mutual. Then she would have the right to beg Elfrida to stop playing fast and loose with her father, and act decisively. If Elfrida only knew, only realized the difference it made, and how little right she had to control at her whim the happiness of any human being—— And Janet brought a strong hand to bear upon her indignation, for she had resolved to go, and to go that night.

Lawrence Cardiff bade his daughter an early good night after their unusually

pleasant dinner. "Do you think you can do it?" he asked her before he went.

Janet started at the question, for they had not mentioned Elfrida again, even remotely. "I think I can, daddy," she answered him gravely, and they separated.

She looked at her watch. By half-past nine she could be in Essex Court.

Yes, Miss Bell was in. She could go straight up, Mrs. Jordan informed her; and she mounted the last flight of stairs with a beating heart. Her mission was important—oh, so important! She had compromised with her conscience in planning it; and now if it should fail! Her hand trembled as she knocked.

In answer to Elfrida's "Come in!" she pushed the door slowly open.

"It is I—Janet," she said. "May I?"

"But of course."

Elfrida rose from a confusion of sheets of manuscript upon the table, and came forward holding out her hand, with an odd gleam in her eyes and an amused, slightly excited smile about her lips.

“How do you do?” she said, with rather ostentatiously supposed wonder. “Please sit down, but not in that chair; it is not quite reliable. This one, I think, is better. How are—how are *you*?”

The slight emphasis she placed on the last word was airy and regardless. Janet would have preferred to have been met by one of the old affectations. She would have felt herself taken more sincerely.

“It is very late to come, and I interrupt you,” she said awkwardly, glancing at the manuscript.

“Not at all! I am very happy——”

“But of course I had a special reason for coming. It is serious enough, I think, to justify me.”

“What can it be?”

“Don’t, Elfrida!” Janet cried passionately. “Listen to me. I have come to try to make things right again between us; to ask you to forgive me for speaking as I—as I did about your writing that day. I am sorry—I am, indeed!”

“I don’t quite understand. You ask me

to *forgive* you ; but what question is there of forgiveness ? You had a perfect right to your opinion ; and I was glad to have it, at least from you, frankly."

"But it offended you, Elfrida. It is what is accountable for the—the rupture between us."

"Perhaps ; but not because it hurt my feelings," Elfrida returned scornfully, "in the ordinary sense. It offended me truly, but in quite another way. In what you said you put me on a different plane from yourself in the matter of artistic execution. Very well ; I am content to stay there—in your opinion. But why this talk of forgiveness ? Neither of us can alter anything. Only," Elfrida breathed quickly, "be sure that I will not be accepted by you upon those terms."

"That wasn't what I meant in the least."

"What else could you have meant ? And more than that," Elfrida went on rapidly—her phrases had the patness of formed conclusions—"what you said betrayed a totally different conception of art, as it expresses

itself in the nudity of things, from the one I supposed you to hold, and, if you will pardon me for saying so, a much lower one. It seems to me that we cannot hold together there, that our aims and creeds are different, and that we have been comrades under false pretences. Perhaps we are both to blame for that; but we cannot change it, or the fact that we have found it out."

Janet bit her lip. The "nudity of things" brought her an instant's impulse toward hysteria—it was so characteristic a touch of candid exaggeration. But her need for reflection helped her to control it. Elfrida had taken a different ground from the one she expected; it was less simple, and a mere apology, however sincere, would not meet it. But there was one thing more which she could say, and with an effort she said it.

"Elfrida, suppose that, even as an expression of opinion—putting it aside as an expression of feeling toward you—what I said that day was not quite sincere. Suppose that I was not quite mistress of myself—I would rather not tell you why——"

“Is that true?” asked Elfrida, directly.

“Yes, it is true. For the moment I wanted more than anything else in the world to break with you. I took the surest means.”

The other girl regarded Janet steadfastly. “But if it is only a question of the *degree* of your sincerity,” she persisted, “I cannot see that the situation alters much.”

“I was not altogether responsible—believe me, Elfrida. I don’t remember now what I said, but—but I am afraid it must have taken all its colour from my feeling.”

“Of course”—Elfrida hesitated, and her tone showed her touched. “I can understand that what I told you about—Mr. Cardiff must have been a shock. For the moment I became an animal, and turned upon you, upon you who had been to me the very soul of kindness. I have hated myself for it—you may be sure of that.”

Janet Cardiff had a moment’s inward struggle, and yielded. She would let Elfrida believe it had been that. After all, it was partly true, and her lips refused absolutely to say the rest.

“Yes, it must have hurt you, more perhaps than I can guess.” Elfrida’s eyes grew wet and her voice shook. “But I can’t understand your retaliating *that way* if you didn’t believe what you said. And if you believed it, what more is there to say?”

Janet felt herself possessed by an intense sensation of playing for stakes, unusual, exciting, and of some personal importance. She did not pause to regard her attitude from any other point of view; she succumbed at once, not without enjoyment, to the necessity for diplomacy. Under its rush of suggestions, her conscience was only vaguely restive. To-morrow it would assert itself—unconsciously she put off paying attention to it until then. Elfrida must come back to her. For the moment the need was to choose her plea.

“It seems to me,” she said slowly, “that there is something between us which is indestructible, Frida. We didn’t make it, and we can’t unmake it. For my part, I think it is worth our preserving, but I don’t believe we could lose it if we tried. You

may put me away from you for any reason that seems good to you, as far as you like, but so long as we both live, there will be that something, recognized or unrecognized. All we can do arbitrarily is to make a joy or a pain of it. Haven't you felt that?"

The other girl looked at her uncertainly. "I have felt it sometimes," she said, "but now it seems to me that I can never be sure that there is not some qualification in it—some hidden flaw."

"Don't you think it's worth making the best of? Can't we make up our minds to have a little charity for the flaws?"

Elfrida shook her head. "I don't think I am capable of a friendship that demands charity," she said.

"And yet, whether we close each other's lips or not, we shall always have things to say, the one to the other, in this world. Is it to be dumbness between us?"

There was a moment's silence in the room—a crucial moment, it seemed to both of them. Elfrida sat against the table with her elbows among its litter of paged manu-

script, her face hidden in her hands. Janet rose and took a step or two toward her. Then she paused, and looked at the little bronze image on the table instead. Elfrida was suddenly shaken by deep, indrawn, silent sobs.

“It is finished, then?” Janet said softly. “We are to separate for always, Buddha, she and I. She will not know any more of me, nor I of her; it will be, so far as we can make it, like the grave. You must belong to a strange people, Buddha, always to smile!” She spoke evenly, quietly, with restraint, and still she did not look at the convulsively silent figure in the chair. “But I am glad you will always keep that face for her, Buddha; I hope the world will too—our world that is sometimes more bitter than you can understand. And I say good-bye to you, for to her I cannot say it.” And she turned to go.

Elfrida stumbled to her feet and hurried to the door. “No,” she said, holding it fast. “No; you must not go that way—I owe you too much after all. We will—we will make the best of it.”

“Not on that ground,” Janet answered gravely. “Neither your friendship nor mine is purchaseable, I hope.”

“No, no ; that was bad. On any ground you like. Only stay a little ; let us find ourselves again.” Elfrida forced a smile into what she said, and Janet let herself be drawn back to the chair.

It was nearly midnight when she found herself again in her cab, driving through the empty lamp-lit Strand toward Kensington. She had prevailed, and now she had to scrutinize her methods. That necessity urged itself beyond her power to turn away from it, and left her sick at heart. She had prevailed—Elfrida, she believed, was hers again. They had talked as candidly as might be of her father. Elfrida had promised nothing, but she would bring matters to an end, Janet knew she would, in a day or two, when she had had time to think how intolerable the situation would be if she didn't. Janet remembered with wonder, however, how little Elfrida seemed to realize that it need make any

difference between them compared with other things, and what a trivial concession she thought it beside the restoration of the privileges of her friendship. The girl asked herself drearily how it would be possible that she should ever forget the frank cynical surprise with which Elfrida had received her entreaty, based on the fact of her father's unrest and the wretchedness of his false hopes—"You have your success; does it really matter—so very much!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

“TO-DAY, remember! You promised that I should see it to-day,” Elfrida reminded Kendal, dropping instantly into the pose they had jointly decided on. “I know I’m late; but you will not punish me by another postponement, will you?”

Kendal looked sternly at his watch. “A good twenty minutes, mademoiselle,” he returned aggrievedly. “It would be only justice—poetic justice—to say no; but I think you may, if we get on to-day.”

He was already at work, turning from the texture of the rounded throat which occupied him before she came in, to the more serious problem of the nuances of expression in the face. It was a whim of his, based partly upon a cautiousness of which he was hardly aware, that she should not see the portrait in

its earlier stages, and she had made a great concession of this. As it grew before him, out of his consciousness, under his hand, he became more and more aware that he would prefer to postpone her seeing it, for reasons which he would not pause to define. Certainly, they were not connected with any sense of having failed to do justice to his subject. Kendal felt an exulting mastery over it which was the most intoxicating sensation his work had ever brought him. He had, as he painted, a silent, brooding triumph in his manipulation, in his control. He gave himself up to the delight of his insight, the power of his reproduction, and to the intense satisfaction of knowing that out of the two there grew something of more than usually keen intrinsic interest within the wide creed of his art. He worked with every nerve tense upon his conception of what he saw, which so excluded other considerations that now and then in answer to some word of hers that distracted him, he spoke to her almost roughly. At which Elfrida, with a little smile of forgiving com-

prehension, obediently kept silence. She saw the artist in him dominant, and she exulted for his sake. It was to her delicious to be the medium of his inspiration, delicious and fit and sweetly acceptable. And they had agreed upon a charming pose.

Presently Kendal lowered his brush impatiently. "Talk to me a little," he said resentfully, ignoring his usual preference that she should not talk because what she said had always power to weaken the concentration of his energy. "There is a little muteness about the lips. Am I very unreasonable? But you don't know what a difficult creature you are."

She threw up her chin in one of her bewitching ways and laughed. "I wouldn't be too simple," she returned. She looked at him with the light of her laughter still in her eyes, and went on, "I know I must be difficult—tremendously difficult—because I, whom you see as an individual, am so many people. Phases of character have an attraction for me. I wear one to-day and another to-morrow. It is very flippant, but you see

I'm honest about it. And it must make me difficult to paint, because it can be only by accident that I am the same person twice."

Without answering, Kendal made two or three rapid strokes. "That's better," he said, as if to himself. "Go on talking, please. What did you say?"

"It doesn't seem to matter much," she answered, with a little pout. "I said, 'Baa, baa, black sheep, have you any wool?'"

"No, you didn't," returned Kendal, as they laughed together. "You said something about being like Cleopatra, a creature of infinite variety, didn't you?—about having a great many disguises"—absently. "But—"

Kendal fell into the absorbed silence of his work again, leaving the sentence unfinished. He looked up at her with a long, close, almost intimate scrutiny, under which, and his careless words, she blushed hotly.

"Then I hope you have chosen my most becoming disguise," she cried imperiously, jumping up. "Now, if you please, I will see."

She stood beside the canvas with her eyes

upon his face, waiting for a sign from him. He, feeling without knowing definitely why, that a critical moment had come between them, rose and stepped back a pace or two, involuntarily pulling himself together to meet what she might say.

“Yes, you may look,” he said, seeing that she would not turn her head without his word; and waited.

Elfrida took three or four steps beyond the easel and faced it. In the first instant of her gaze her face grew radiant.

“Ah!” she said softly. “How unconscionably you must have flattered me! I can’t be so pretty as that!”

A look of relief shot across Kendal’s face. “I’m glad you like it,” he said briefly. “It’s a capital pose.”

The first thing that could possibly be observed about the portrait was its almost dramatic loveliness. The head was turned a little, and the eyes regarded something distant, with a half-wishful, half-deprecating dreaminess. The lips were plaintively courageous, and the line of the lifted chin

and throat helped the pathetic eyes and annihilated the heaviness of the other features. It was as if the face made an expressive effort to subdue a vitality which might otherwise have been aggressive, but while the full value of this effect of spiritual repose was caught and rendered, Kendal had done his work in a vibrant significant chord of colour that strove for the personal force beneath, and brought it out. It was this, the personal force, that rewarded a second glance.

Elfrida dropped into the nearest chair, clasped her knees in her hands, and bending forward earnestly regarded the canvas with a silence that presently became perceptible. It seemed to Kendal at first, as he stood talking to her of its technicalities, that she tested the worth of every stroke; then he became aware that she was otherwise occupied, and that she did not hear him. He paused, and stepped over to where, standing behind her chair, he shared her point of view. Even the exaltation of his success did not prevent his impatient wonder why his relation with this girl must always be so uncomfortable.

Then, as he stood in silence, looking with her, it seemed that he saw with her; and the thing that he had done revealed itself to him for the first time fully, convincingly, with no appeal. He looked at it with curious painful interest, but without remorse, even in the knowledge that she saw it too, and suffered. He realized exultingly, that he had done better work than he thought; he might repent later, but for the moment he could feel nothing but that. As to the girl before him, she was simply the source and the reason of it; he was particularly glad he had happened to come across her.

He had echoed her talk of disguises, and his words embodied the unconscious perception under which he worked. He had selected a disguise, and, as she wished, a becoming one. But he had not used it fairly, seriously. He had thrown it over her face like a veil, if anything could be a veil which rather revealed than hid, rather emphasized than softened, the human secret of the face underneath. He realized now

that he had been guided by a broader perception, by deeper instincts, in painting that. It was the real Elfrida.

There was still a moment before she spoke. He wondered vaguely how she would take it, and he was conscious of an anxiety to get it over. At last she rose and faced him, with one hand, that trembled, resting on the back of the chair. Her face wore a look that was almost profound, and there was an acknowledgment in it, a degree of submission, which startled him.

“So that is how you have read me,” she said, looking again at the portrait. “Oh, I do not find fault; I would like to, but I dare not. I am not sure enough that you are wrong; no, I am too sure that you are right. I am indeed very much pre-occupied with myself. I have always been—I shall always be. Don’t think I shall reform after this moral shock, as people in books do; I am what I am. But I acknowledge that an egotist doesn’t make an agreeable picture, however charmingly you apologize for her. It is a personality of

stone, isn't it — implacable, unchangeable? I have often felt that."

Kendal was incapable of denying a word of what she said. "If it is any comfort to you to know it," he ventured, "hardly any one will see in it what you—and I—see."

"Yes," she said, with a smile; "that's true. I shan't mind its going to the Academy."

She sat down again and looked fixedly at the picture, her chin propped in her hand. "Don't you feel," she said, looking up at him with a little childish gesture of confidence, "as if you had stolen something from me?"

"Yes," Kendal declared honestly, "I do. I've taken something you didn't intend me to have."

"Well, I give it you—it is yours quite freely and ungrudgingly. Don't feel that way any more. You have a right to your divination," she added bravely. "I would not withhold it if I could. Only—I hope you find *something* good in it. I think, myself, there is something?"

Her look was a direct interrogation, and Kendal flinched before it. "Dear creature," he murmured, "you are very true to yourself."

"And to you," she pleaded, "—always to you, too! Has there ever been anything but the clearest honesty between us? Ah, my friend, that's valuable; there are few people who inspire it."

She had risen again, and he found himself shamefacedly holding her hand. His conscience roused itself and smote him mightily. Had there always been this absolute single-mindedness between them?

"You make it necessary for me to tell you," he said slowly, "that there is one thing between us that you do not know. I saw you at Cheynemouth, on the stage."

"I know you did," she smiled at him; "Janet Cardiff let it out by accident. I suppose you came, like Mr. Cardiff, because you—disapproved. Then why didn't you remonstrate with me? I've often wondered." Elfrida spoke softly, dreamily. Her happiness seemed very near. Her self-surrender

was so perfect, and his understanding, as it always had been, so sweet, that the illusion of the moment was cruelly perfect. She raised her eyes to Kendal's with an abandonment of tenderness in them that quickened his heart-beats, man that he was. "Tell me, do *you* want me to give it up—my book—last night I finished it—my ambition?"

She was ready with her sacrifice, or for the instant she believed herself to be, and it was not wholly without an effort that he put it away. On the pretence of picking up his palette knife, he relinquished her hand.

"It is not a matter upon which I have permitted myself a definite opinion," he said, more coldly than he intended, "but for your own sake I should advise it."

For her own sake! The room seemed full of the echo of his words. A blank look crossed the girl's face; she turned instinctively away from him, and picked up her hat. She put it on and buttoned her gloves without the faintest knowledge of what she was doing; her senses were wholly occupied with the

comprehension of the collapse that had taken place within her. It was the single moment of her life when she differed in any important way from the girl Kendal had painted. Her self-consciousness was a wreck, she no longer controlled it; it tossed at the mercy of her emotion. Her face was very white and painfully empty, her eyes wandered uncertainly round the room, unwilling above all things to meet Kendal's again. She had forgotten about the portrait.

"I will go, then," she said simply, without looking at him, and, this time with a flash, Kendal comprehended again. He held the door open for her mutely, with the keenest pang his pleasant life had ever brought him, and she passed out and down the dingy stairs.

On the first landing she paused and turned. "I will never be different!" she said aloud, as if he were still beside her—"I will never be different!" She swiftly unbuttoned one of her gloves and fingered the curious silver ring that gleamed uncertainly on her hand in the shabby light of the

staircase. The alternative within it, the alternative like a bit of brown sugar, offered itself very suggestively at the moment. She looked round at the dingy place she stood in, and in imagination threw herself across the lowest step. Even at that miserable instant she was aware of the strong, the artistic, the effective thing to do. "And when he came down he might tread on me!" she said to herself, with a very real shudder. "I wish I had the courage. But no; it might hurt, after all. I am a coward too."

She had an overwhelming realization of impotence in every direction. It came upon her like a burden; under it she grew sick and faint. At the door she stumbled, and she was hardly sure of her steps to her cab, which was drawn up by the kerb-stone, and in which she presently went blindly home.

By ten o'clock that night she had herself, in a manner, in hand again. Her eyes were still wide and bitter and the baffled uncomprehending look had not quite gone out of them, but a line or two of cynical

acceptance had drawn themselves round her lips. She had sat so long and so quietly regarding the situation that she became conscious of the physical discomfort of stiffened limbs. She leaned back in her chair and put her feet on another and lighted a cigarette.

"No, Buddha," she said as if to a confessor, "don't think it of me. It was a lie, a pose to tempt him on. I would never have given it up—never! It is more to me—I am *almost* sure—than he is. It is part of my soul, Buddha, and my love for him—oh, I cannot tell!"

She threw the cigarette away from her and stared at the smiling image with heavy eyes in silence. Then she went on.

"But I always tell you everything, little bronze god, and I won't keep back even this. There was a moment when I would have let him take me in his arms and hold me close, close to him. And I wish he had—I should have had it to remember. Bah! Why is my face hot? I might as well be ashamed of wanting my dinner!"

Again she dropped into silence, and when next she spoke her whole face had hardened.

“But no! He thinks that he has read me finally, that he has done with me, that I no longer count! He will marry some red-and-white cow of an Englishwoman who will accept herself in the light of a reproductive agent and do her duty by him accordingly. As I would not—no! Good heavens, no! So perhaps it is as well, for I will go on loving him of course, and some day he will come back to me, in his shackles, and together, whatever we do, we will make no vulgar mess of it. In the meantime, Buddha, I will smile, like you.

“And there is always this, which is the best of me. You agree, don’t you, that it is the best of me?” She fingered the manuscript in her lap. “All my power, all my joy, the quintessence of my life! I think I shall be angry if it has a common success, if the people like it too well. I only want recognition for it—recognition and acknowledgment and admission. I want George Meredith to ask to be intro-

duced to me!" She made a rather pitiful effort to smile. "And that, Buddha, is what will happen."

Mechanically she lighted another cigarette and turned over her first rough pages—a copy had gone to Rattray—looking for passages she had wrought most to her satisfaction. They left her cold, as she read them, but she was not unaware that the reason of this lay elsewhere; and when she went to bed she put the packet under her pillow and slept a little better for the comfort of it.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN the week that followed Janet Cardiff's visit to Elfrida's attic these two young women went through a curious reapproachment. At every step it was tentative, but at every step it was also enjoyable. They made sacrifices to meet on most days; they took long walks together, and arranged lunches at out-of-the-way restaurants; they canvassed eagerly such matters of interest in the world that supremely attracted them as had been lying undiscussed between them until now. The intrinsic pleasure that was in each for the other had been enhanced by deprivation, and they tasted it again with a keenness of savour which was a surprise to both of them. Their mutual understanding of many things, their common point of view, reasserted itself more strongly than

ever as a mutual possession ; they could not help perceiving its value. Janet made a fairly successful attempt to drown her sense of insincerity in the recognition. She, Janet, was conscious of a deliberate effort to widen and deepen the sympathy between them. An obscure desire to make reparation, she hardly knew for what, combined itself with a great longing to see their friendship the altogether beautiful and perfect thing its mirage was, and pushed her on to seize every opportunity to fortify the place she had retaken.

Elfrida had never found her so considerate, so appreciative, so amusing, so prodigal of her gay ideas, so much inclined to go upon her knees at shrines before which she sometimes stood and mocked. She had a special happiness in availing herself of an opportunity which resulted in Elfrida's receiving a letter from the editor of the *St. George's*, asking her for two or three articles on the American Colony in Paris ; and only very occasionally she recognized, with a subtle thrill of disgust, that she was employ-

ing diplomacy in every action, every word, almost every look which concerned her friend. She asked herself then despairingly how it could last, and what good could come of it, whereupon fifty considerations, armed with whips, drove her on.

Perhaps the most potent of these was the consciousness that in spite of it all, she was not wholly successful, that as between Elfrida and herself things were not entirely as they had been. They were cordial, they were mutually appreciative, they had moments of expansive intercourse; but Janet could not disguise to herself the fact that there was a difference—the difference between fit and fusion. The impression was not a strong one, but she half suspected her friend now and then of intently watching her; and she could not help observing how reticent the girl had become upon certain subjects that touched her personally. The actress in Elfrida was nevertheless constantly supreme, and interfered with the trustworthiness of any single impression. She could not resist the pardoning *rôle*; she played it intermit-

tently, with a pretty impulsiveness that would have amused Miss Cardiff more if it had irritated her less. For the certainty that Elfrida would be her former self for three days together, Janet would have dispensed gladly with the little Bohemian dinner in Essex Court in honour of her book, or the violets that sometimes dropped out of Elfrida's notes, or even the sudden, but premeditated, occasional offer of Elfrida's lips.

Meanwhile the Halifaxes were urging their Western trip upon her. Lady Halifax declared roundly that she was looking wretchedly. Miss Halifax suggested playfully the possibility of an American heroine for her next novel. Janet, repelling both publicly, admitted both privately. She felt worn out physically, and when she thought of producing another book her brain responded with a helpless negative. She had been turning lately with dogged conviction to her work as the only solace life was likely to offer her, and anything that hinted at loss of power filled her with blank dismay. She was desperately weary, and she wanted to forget, desiring

besides some sort of stimulus as a flagging swimmer desires a rope.

One more reason came and took possession of her common-sense. Between her father and Elfrida she felt herself a complication. If she could bring herself to consent to her own removal, the situation, she could not help seeing, would be considerably simplified. She read plainly in her father that the finality Elfrida promised had not yet been given; doubtless an opportunity had not yet occurred, and Janet was willing to concede that the circumstances might require a rather special opportunity. When it should occur, she recognized that delicacy, decency almost, demanded that she should be out of the way. She shrank miserably from the prospect of being a daily familiar looker-on at the spectacle of Lawrence Cardiff's pain, and she had a knowledge that there would be somehow an aggravation of it in her person. In a year everything would mend itself, more or less, she believed dully, and tried to feel. Her father would be the same again, with his old fond humour and criti-

cism of her enthusiasms, his old interest in things and people, his old comradeship for her. John Kendal would have married Elfrida Bell—what an idyl they would make of life together!—and she, Janet, would have accepted the situation. Her interest in the prospective pleasures on which Lady Halifax expatiated was slight; she was obliged to speculate upon its rising, which she did with all the confidence she could command. She declined absolutely to read Bryce's "*American Commonwealth*," or Miss Bird's account of the Rocky Mountains, or anybody's travels in the Orient, upon all of which Miss Halifax had painstakingly fixed her attention; but one afternoon she ordered a blue serge travelling dress, and refused one or two literary engagements for the present, and the next day wrote to Lady Halifax that she had decided to go.

Her father received her decision with more relief than he meant to show, and Janet had a bitter half-hour over it. Then she plunged with energy into her arrangements, and Lawrence Cardiff made

her inconsistently happy again with the interest he took in them, supplemented by an extremely dainty little travelling clock. He became suddenly so solicitous for her that she sometimes quivered before the idea that he guessed all the reasons that were putting her to flight. Which gave her a wholly unnecessary pang, for nothing would have astonished Lawrence Cardiff more than to be confronted, at the moment, with any passion that was not his own.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

KENDAL, as the door closed behind Elfrida on the afternoon of her last sitting, shutting him in with himself and the portrait on the easel and the revelation she had made, did his best to feel contrition, and wondered that he was so little successful. He assured himself that he had been a brute; yet in an uncompromising review of all that he had ever said or done in connection with Elfrida, he failed to satisfy his own indignation with himself by discovering any occasion upon which his brutality had been particularly obvious. He remembered with involuntary self-justification how distinctly she had insisted upon *camaraderie* between them; how she had spurned everything that savoured of another standard of manners on his part; how she had actually had the curious taste to want

him to call her "old chap," and how it had grated. He remembered her only half-veiled invitation, her challenge to him to see as much as he cared, and to make what he could of her. He was to blame for accepting, but he would have been a conceited ass if he had thought of the danger of a result like this. In the midst of his reflections an idea came to him about the portrait, and he observed with irritation, after giving it a few touches, that the light was irretrievably gone for the day.

Next morning he worked for three hours at it without a pang, and in the afternoon, with relaxed nerves and a high heart, he took his hat and turned his face towards Kensington Square. The distance was considerable, but he walked, lightly, rapidly, with a conscious enjoyment of that kind of relief to his wrought nerves, his very limbs drawing energy from the knowledge of his finished work. Never before had he felt so completely the divine sense of success, and though he had worked at the portrait with passionate concentration from the beginning, this realiza-

tion had come to him only the day before, when, stepping back to look with Elfrida, he perceived what he had done. Troubled as the revelation was, in it he saw himself a master. He had for once escaped, and he felt that the escape was a notable one, from the tyranny of his brilliant *technique*. He had subjected it to his idea, which had grown upon the canvas obscure to him under his own brush until that final moment; and he recognized with astonishment how relative and incidental the truth of the treatment seemed in comparison with the truth of the idea.

With the modern scornful word for the literary value of paintings on his lips, Kendal was forced to admit, that in this his consummate picture, as he very truly thought it, the chief significance lay elsewhere than in the brushing and the colour—they were only its dramatic exponents—and the knowledge of this brought him a new and glorious sense of control. It had already carried him further in power, this portrait, it would carry him further in place, than anything he had yet

done, and the thought gave a sparkle to the delicious ineffable content that bathed his soul. He felt that the direction of his walk intensified his eager physical joy in it. He was going to Janet with his success as he had always gone to her. As soon as the absorbing vision of his work admitted another perception, it was Janet's sympathy, Janet's applause that mingled itself with his certain reward. He could not say that it had inspired him in the least, but it formed a very essential part of his triumph. He could wish her more exacting, but this time he had done something that should make her less easy to satisfy in the future. Unconsciously he hastened his steps through the gardens, switching off a daisy-head now and then with his stick as he went, and pausing only once, when he found himself, to his utter astonishment, asking a purely incidental errand boy if he wanted sixpence.

Janet, in the drawing-room, received him with hardly a quickening of pulse. It was so nearly over now; she seemed to have packed up a good part of her tiresome heart-

ache with the warm things Lady Halifax had dictated for the Atlantic. She had a vague expectation that it would reappear, but not until she unlocked the box in mid-ocean, where it wouldn't matter so much. She knew that it was only reasonable and probable that she should see him again before they left for Liverpool. She had been expecting this visit, and she meant to be unflinching with herself when she exchanged farewells with him. She meant to make herself believe that the occasion was quite an ordinary one—also until afterwards, when her feelings about it would be of less consequence.

“Well,” she asked directly, with a failing heart, as she saw his face, “what is your good news?”

Kendal laughed aloud—it was delightful to be anticipated. “So I am unconsciously advertising it,” he said. “Guess!”

His tone had the vaunting glory of a lover's—a lover new to his lordship, with his privileges still sweet upon his lips. Janet felt a little cold contraction about her

heart, and sank quickly into the nearest armchair.

“How can I guess,” she said, looking behind him at the wall, which she did not see, “without anything to go upon? Give me a hint.”

Kendal laughed again. “It’s very simple, and you know something about it already.”

Then she was not mistaken—there was no chance of it. She tried to look at him with smiling sympathetic intelligence, while her whole being quivered in anticipation of the blow that was coming.

“Does it—does it concern another person?” she faltered.

Kendal looked grave, and suffered an instant’s compunction. “It does—it does indeed,” he assured her. “It concerns Miss Elfrida Bell very much, in a way.—Ah,” he went on impatiently, as she still sat silent, “why are you so unnaturally dull, Janet? I’ve finished that young woman’s portrait, and it is more—satisfactory—than I ever in my life dared hope that any picture of mine would be.”

“Is that all?”

The words escaped her in a quick breath of relief. Her face was crimson, and the room seemed to swim.

“All!” she heard Kendal say reproachfully. “Wait until you see it!”

He experienced a shade of dejection, and there was an instant’s silence between them, during which it seemed to Janet that the world was made over again. “That young woman!” She disloyally extracted the last suggestion of indifference out of the phrase, and found it the sweetest she had heard for months. But her brain whirled with the effort to decide what it could possibly mean.

“I hope you have made it as beautiful as Elfrida is,” she cried, with sharp self-reproof. “It must have been difficult to do that.”

“I have made it—what she is, I think,” he answered, again with that sudden gravity. “It is so like my conception of her which I have never felt permitted to explain to you, that I feel as if I had stolen a march upon her. You must see it. When will you come?”

It goes in the day after to-morrow, but I can't wait for your opinion till it's hung."

"I like your calm reliance upon the Committee," Janet laughed. "Suppose——"

"I won't. It will go on the line," Kendal returned confidently. "I did nothing last year that I would permit to be compared with it. Will you come to-morrow?"

"Impossible. I haven't two consecutive minutes to-morrow. We sail, you know, on Thursday."

Kendal looked at her blankly. "You sail? On Thursday?"

"I am going to America, Lady Halifax and I, and Elizabeth of course. We are to be away a year. Lady Halifax is buying tickets, I am collecting light literature, and Elizabeth is in pursuit of facts. Oh, we are deep in preparation. I thought you knew."

"How could I know?"

"Elfrida didn't tell you, then?"

"Did she know?"

"Oh yes—ten days ago."

"Odd that she didn't mention it."

Janet told herself that it was odd, but

found with some surprise that it was not more than odd. There had been a time when the discovery that she and her affairs were of so little consequence to her friend, would have given her a wondering pang; but that time seemed to have passed. She talked lightly on about her journey; her voice and her thoughts had suddenly been freed. She dilated upon the pleasures she anticipated as if they had been real, skimming over the long spaces of his silence, and gathering gaiety as he grew more and more sombre. When he rose to go, their moods had changed; the brightness and the flush were hers, and his face spoke only of a puzzled dejection, an anxious uncertainty.

“So it is good-bye,” he said as she gave him her hand, “for a year?”

Something in his voice made her look up suddenly, with such an unconscious tenderness in her eyes as he had never seen in any other woman's. She dropped them before he could be quite certain he recognized it, though his heart was beating in a way which told him there had been no mistake.

“Lady Halifax means it to be a year,” she answered. And surely, since it was to be a year, he might keep her hand an instant longer.

The full knowledge of what this girl was to him seemed to descend upon John Kendal then, and he stood silent under it, pale and grave eyed, baring his heart to the rush of the first serious emotion life had brought him, filled with a single conscious desire—that she should show him that sweetness in her eyes again. But she looked wilfully down, and he could only come closer to her, with a sudden muteness upon his ready lips, and a strange new-born fear wrestling for possession of him. For in that moment Janet, hitherto so simple, so approachable, as it were so available, had become remote, difficult, incomprehensible. Kendal invested her with the change in himself, and quivered in uncertainty as to what it might do with her. He seemed to have nothing to trust to but that one glance for knowledge of the girl his love had newly exalted; and still she stood before him look-

ing down. He took two or three vague steps into the middle of the room, drawing her with him. In their nearness to each other the silence between them held them intoxicatingly, and he had her in his arms before he found occasion to say between lingering kisses upon her hair—

“You can’t go, Janet. You must stay—and marry me.”

* * * *

“I don’t know,” wrote Lawrence Cardiff in a postscript to a note to Miss Bell that evening, “that Janet will thank me for forestalling her with such all-important news, but I can’t resist the pleasure of telling you that she and Kendal got themselves engaged, without so much as a ‘by your leave’ to me, this afternoon. The young man shamelessly stayed to dinner, and I am informed that they mean to be married in June. Kendal is full of your portrait; we are to see it to-morrow. I hope he has arranged that we shall have the advantage of comparing it with the original.”

CHAPTER XXXIV.

"MISS CARDIFF'S in the lib'ry, sir," said the housemaid, opening the door for Kendal next morning, with a smile which he did not find too broadly sympathetic. He went up the stairs two steps at a time, whistling like a schoolboy.

"Lady Halifax says," he announced, taking immediate possession of Janet where she stood, and drawing her to a seat beside him on the lounge, "that the least we can do by way of reparation is to arrange our wedding trip in their society. She declares she will wait any reasonable time; but I assured her delicately that her idea of compensation was a little exaggerated."

Janet looked at him with an absent smile. "Yes, I think so," she said; but her eyes

were preoccupied, and the lover in him resented it.

“What is it? he asked. “What has happened, dear?”

She looked down at an open letter in her hand, and for a moment said nothing. “I don’t know whether I ought to tell you, but it would be a relief.”

“Can there be anything you ought not to tell me?” he insisted tenderly.

“Perhaps, on the other hand, I ought,” she said reflectively. “It may help you to a proper definition of my character, and then—you may think less of me. Yes, I think I ought.”

“Darling, for Heaven’s sake don’t talk nonsense.”

“I had a letter—this letter—a little while ago, from Elfrida Bell.” She held it out to him. “Read it!”

Kendal hesitated and scanned her face. She was smiling now; she had the look of amused dismay that might greet an ineffectual blow. He took the letter.

“If it is from Miss Bell,” he said, at a

suggestion from his conscience. "I fancy, for some reason, it is not pleasant."

"No," she replied, "it is not pleasant."

He unfolded the letter, recognized the characteristic broad margins and the repressed, rounded perpendicular hand with its supreme effort after significance, and his face reflected a tinge of his old amused curiosity. It was only a reflection, and yet it distinctly embodied the idea that he might be on the brink of a further discovery. He glanced at Janet again. Her hands were clasped in her lap, and she was looking straight before her with smilingly grave lips and lowered lids, which nevertheless gave him a glimpse of retrospection. He felt the beginnings of indignation, yet he looked back at the letter acquisitively; its interest was intrinsic.

"I feel that I can no longer hold myself in honour," he read, "if I refrain further from defining the personal situation between us as it appears to me. That I have let nearly three weeks go by without doing it,

you may put it down to my weakness and selfishness, to your own charm, to what you will; but I shall be glad if you will not withhold the blame that is due me in the matter, for I have wronged you, as well as myself, in keeping silence.

“Look, it is all here in a nutshell. *Nothing is changed*. I have tried to believe otherwise, but the truth is stronger than my will. My opinion of you is a naked uncompromising fact; I cannot drape it or adorn it, or even throw around it a mist of charity. It is inalterably there, and in any future intercourse with you, such intercourse as we have had in the past, I should only dash myself for ever against it. I do not clearly see upon what level you accepted me in the beginning; but I am absolutely firm in my belief that it was not such as I would have tolerated if I had known. To-day at all events I am confronted with the proof that I have not had your confidence, that you have not thought it worth while to be single-minded in your relation to me. From a personal point of view there is more that

I might say, but perhaps that is damning enough, and I have no desire to be abusive. It is on my conscience to add, moreover, that I find you a sophist, and your sophistry a little vulgar. I find that you compromise with your ambitions, which in themselves are not above reproach from any point of view. I find you adulterating what ought to be the pure stream of ideality with muddy considerations of what the people are pleased to call the moralities, and with the feebler contamination of the conventionalities."

"I *couldn't* smoke with her," commented Janet, reading over his shoulder. "It wasn't that I objected in the least, but it made me so very—uncomfortable that I would never try a second time."

Kendal's smile deepened, and he read on without answering except by pressing her finger-tips against his lips.

"I should be sorry to deny your great cleverness and your pretensions to a certain sort of artistic interpretation. But to me the *artist bourgeois* is an outsider, who must remain outside. He has nothing to gain

by fellowship with me, and I—pardon me—have much to lose.

“So, if you please, we will go our separate ways, and doubtless will represent each to the other an experiment that has failed. You will believe me when I say that I am intensely sorry. And perhaps you will accept, as sincerely as I offer it, my wish that the future may bring you success even more brilliant than you have already attained.” (Here a line had been carefully scratched out.)

“What I have written, I have written under compulsion—I am sure you will understand that.

“Believe me, yours sincerely,

“ELFRIDA BELL.

“P.S.—I had a dream once of what I fancied our friendship might be. It is a long time ago, and the days between have faded all the colour and sweetness out of my dream; still, I remember that it was beautiful. For the sake of that fair imagining, and because it was beautiful, I will send you, if you will allow me, a photograph of a painting which I like—which represents art as I have learned to kneel to it.”

Kendal read this communication through with a look of amusement until he came to the postscript. Then he threw back his head and laughed outright. Janet's face had changed; she tried to smile in concert, but the effort was rather piteous.

"Oh, Jack," she said, "please take it seriously."

But he laughed on irrepressibly. She tried to cover his lips.

"*Don't* shout so!" she begged, as if there were illness in the house or a funeral next door; and he saw something in her face which stopped him.

"My darling, it can't hurt; it doesn't, does it?"

"I'd like to say no, but it does a little. Not so much as it would have done a little while ago."

"Are you going to accept Miss Bell's souvenir of her shattered ideal? That's the best thing in the letter; that's really supreme!" and Kendal, still broadly mirthful, stretched out his hand to take it again; but Janet drew it back.

"No," she said, "of course not; that was silly of her. But a good deal of the rest is true, I'm afraid, Jack."

"It's damnably impudent," he cried, with sudden anger. "I suppose she believes it herself, and that's the measure of its truth. How dare she dogmatize to you about the art of your work? *She to you!*"

"Oh, it isn't that I care about. It doesn't matter to me how little she thinks of my aims and my methods. I'm quite content to do my work with what artistic conception I've got without analyzing its quality—I'm thankful enough to have any. Besides, I'm not sure about the finality of her opinion——"

"You needn't be!" Kendal interrupted with scorn.

"But what hurts like a knife is that part about my sincerity. I *haven't* been honest with her—I haven't! From the very beginning I've criticized her privately. I've felt all sorts of reserves and qualifications about her, and concealed them for the sake of—of I don't know what—the pleasure I had in knowing her, I suppose."

"It seems to me pretty clear from this precious communication that she was quietly reciprocating," Kendal said bluntly.

"That doesn't clear me in the least. Besides, when she had made up her mind, she had the courage to tell me what she thought. There was some principle in that. I—I admire her for doing it; but I couldn't myself."

"Thank the Lord, no! And I wouldn't be too sure, if I were you, darling, about the unmixed heroism that dictates her letter. I dare say she fancied it was that, but——"

Janet's head leapt up from his shoulder.

"Now you are unjust to her!" she cried. "You don't know Elfrida, Jack, if you think her capable of assuming a motive——"

"Well, do you know what I think?" said Kendal with an irrelevant smile, glancing at the letter she held in her hand. "I think she has kept a copy."

Janet looked at him with reproachful eyes, which nevertheless had the relief of amusement in them.

"Don't you?" he insisted.

“I—I dare say.”

“And she thoroughly enjoyed writing as she did. The phrases read as if she had rolled them under her tongue. It was a *coup*, don’t you see; and the making of a *coup* of any kind, at any expense, is the most refined joy which life affords that young person.”

“There’s sincerity in every line!”

“Oh, she means what she says; but she found an exquisite gratification in saying it which you cannot comprehend, dear. This letter is a flower of her egotism, as it were. She regards it with natural ecstasy, as an achievement——”

Janet shook her head. “Oh no, no!” she cried miserably. “You can’t realize the sort of thing there was between us, dear; and how it should have been sacred to me beyond all tampering and cavilling, or it should not have been at all. It isn’t that I didn’t know all the time that I was disloyal to her, while she thought I was sincerely her friend. I did! And now she has found me out; and it serves me perfectly right—perfectly!”

Kendal reflected for a moment, and then he brought comfort to her from his last resource.

"Of course, the intimacy between two girls is a wholly different thing; and I don't know whether the relation between Miss Bell and myself affords any parallel to it——"

"Oh, Jack! And I thought——"

"What did you think, dearest?"

"I thought," said Janet, in a voice considerably muffled by contact with his tweed coat collar, "that you were perfectly, *madly* in love with her."

"Heavens!" Kendal cried, as if the contingency had been physically impossible. "It's a man's privilege to fall in love with a woman, darling, not with an incarnate idea."

"It's a very beautiful idea."

"I'm not sure of that. It looks well from the outside, but it is quite incapable of any growth or much change," Kendal went on musingly; "and in the end—Lord, how a man would be bored!"

"You are incapable of being fair to her," came from the coat collar.

“Perhaps. I have something else to think of, since yesterday. Janet, look up!”

She looked up, and for a little space Elfrida Bell found oblivion as complete as she could have desired between them. Then—

“You were telling me,” Janet said.

“Yes, your Elfrida and I had a sort of friendship too; it began, as you know, in Paris. And I was quite aware that one does not have an ordinary friendship with her; it accedes and it exacts more than the common relation. And I’ve sometimes made myself uncomfortable with the idea that she gave me credit for a more faultless conception of her than I possessed. For the honest, brutal truth is, I’m afraid, that I’ve only been working her out. When the portrait was finished I found that somehow I had succeeded. She saw it too, and so I fancy my false position has righted itself. So I haven’t been sincere to her either, Janet. But my conscience seems fairly callous about it. I can’t help reflecting that we are to other people pretty much what they deserve that we shall be. We can’t control our respect.”

"I've lost hers," Janet repeated with depression.

Kendal gave an impatient groan. "I don't think you'll miss it," he said.

"And—Jack—haven't you any compunctions about exhibiting that portrait?"

"Absolutely none." He looked at her with candid eyes. "Of course, if she wished me to, I would destroy it. I respect her property in it so far as that; but so long as she accepts it as the significant truth it is, I am incapable of regretting it. I have painted her with her permission, as I saw her, as she is. If I had given her a squint or a dimple I could accuse myself; but I have not wronged her or gratified myself by one touch of misrepresentation."

"I am to see it this afternoon," said Janet. Unconsciously she was looking forward to finding some measure of justification for herself in the portrait; why, it would be difficult to say.

"Yes; I put it into its frame with my own hands yesterday. I don't know when anything has given me so much pleasure.

And so far as Miss Bell is concerned," he went on, "it is an unpleasant thing to say, but one's acquaintance with her seems more and more to resolve itself into an opportunity for observation, and to be without significance other than that. I tell you frankly I began to see that when I found I shared what she called her friendship with Golightly Ticke. And I think, dear, with people like you and me, any more serious feeling towards her is impossible."

"Doesn't it distress you to think that she believes you incapable of speaking of her like this?"

"I think," said Kendal, slowly, "that she knows how I would be likely to speak of her."

"Well," Janet returned, "I'm glad you haven't reason to suffer about her as I do. And I don't know at all how to answer her letter."

"I'll tell you," Kendal replied. He jumped up and brought her a pen and a sheet of paper and a blotting-pad, and sat down again beside her, holding the ink-bottle. "Write 'My dear Miss Bell.'"

“But she began her letter without any formality.”

“Never mind, that’s a cheapness that you needn’t imitate even for the sake of politeness. Write ‘My dear Miss Bell.’”

Janet wrote it.

“‘I am sorry to find,’” Kendal dictated slowly, a few words at a time, “‘that the flaws in my regard for you are sufficiently considerable—to attract your attention as strongly as your letter indicates. The right of judgment on so personal a matter—is indisputably yours, however,—and I write to acknowledge, not to question it.’”

“Dear, that isn’t as I feel.”

“It’s as you will feel,” Kendal replied ruthlessly. “Now add, ‘I have to acknowledge the very candid expression of your opinion of myself,—which does not lose in interest—by the somewhat exaggerated idea of its value which appears to have dictated it,—and to thank you for your extremely kind offer to send me a picture. I am afraid, however,—even in view of the idyllic consideration you mention,—I cannot allow myself to take advantage of that.’”

"On the whole I wouldn't allude to the shattered ideal."

"Oh no, dear. Go on."

"Or the fact that you probably wouldn't be able to hang it up," he added grimly. "Now write,—'You may be glad to know that the episode in my life—which your letter terminates—appears to me to be of less importance than you perhaps imagine it,—notwithstanding a certain soreness over its close.'"

"It doesn't, Jack."

"It will. I wouldn't say anything more if I were you; just 'Yours very truly, Janet Cardiff.'"

She wrote as he dictated, and then read the letter slowly over from the beginning.

"It sounds very hard, dear," she said, lifting eyes to his that he saw were full of tears, "and as if I didn't care."

"My darling," he said, taking her into his arms, "I hope you don't—I hope you won't care, after to-morrow. And now don't you think we have had enough of Miss Elfrida Bell for the present?"

CHAPTER XXXV.

AT three o'clock, one hour before he expected the Cardiffs, John Kendal ran up the stairs to his studio. The door stood ajar, and with a jealous sense of his possession within, he reproached himself for his carelessness in leaving it so. He had placed the portrait the day before where all the light in the room fell upon it, and his first hasty impression of the place assured him that it stood there still. When he looked directly at it he instinctively shut the door, made a step or two forward, closed his eyes, and so stood for a moment, with his hand before them. Then with a groan, "Damnation!" he opened them again and faced the fact. The portrait was literally in rags. They hung from the top of the frame and swung

over the bottom of it. Hardly enough of the canvas remained unriddled to show that it had represented anything human. Its destruction was absolute—fiendish it seemed to Kendal. He dropped into a chair and stared with his knee locked in his hands.

“Damnation!” he repeated with a white face. “I’ll never approach it again.” And then he added grimly, still speaking aloud, “Janet will say I deserved it.”

He had not an instant’s doubt of the author of the destruction, and he remembered with a flash in connection with it the little silver-handled Algerian dagger that pinned one of Nádíe Palicsky’s studies against the wall of Elfrida’s room. It was not till a quarter of an hour afterwards that he thought it worth while to pick up the note that lay on the table addressed to him, and then he opened it with a nauseated sense of her unnecessary insistence.

“I have come here this morning,” she had written, “determined either to kill myself or IT. It is impossible, I find, notwith-

standing all that I said, that both should continue to exist. I cannot explain further; you must not ask it of me. You may not believe me when I tell you that I struggled hard to let it be myself. I had such a hideous doubt as to which had the best right to live. But I failed there—death is too ghastly. So I did what you see. In doing it I think I committed the unforgivable sin—not against you, but against art. It may be some satisfaction to you to know that I shall never wholly respect myself again in consequence.” A word or two scratched out, and then—

“Understand that I bear no malice toward you, have no blame for you, only honour. You acted under the very highest obligation. You could not have done otherwise. * * * * * And I am glad to think that I do not destroy with your work the joy you had in it.” * * *

Kendal noted the consideration of this final statement with a cynical laugh, and counted the asterisks. Why the devil hadn't

he locked the door! His confidence in her had been too ludicrous. He read the note half through once again, and then with uncontrollable impatience tore it into shreds. To have done it at all was hideous, but to try and impress herself in doing it was disgusting. He reflected with a smile of incredulous contempt upon what she had said about killing herself, and wondered in his anger how she could be so blind to her own disingenuousness. Five asterisks—she had made them carefully—and then the preposterousness about what she had destroyed and what she hadn't destroyed—and then more asterisks! What had she thought they could possibly signify?—what could anything she might say possibly signify?

In a savage rudimentary way he went over the ethical aspect of the affair, coming to no very clear conclusion. He would have destroyed the thing himself if she had asked him, but she should have asked him! And even in his engrossing indignation he could experience a kind of spiritual blush as he recognized how safe his concession was

behind the improbability of its condition. Finally he wrote a line to Janet, informing her that the portrait had sustained an injury, and postponing her and her father's visit to the studio. He would come in the morning to tell her about it, he added, and despatched the missive by the boy downstairs, post haste, in a cab. It would be to-morrow, he reflected, before he could screw himself up to talking about it, even to Janet. For that day he must be alone with his discomfiture.

* * * * *

In the days of his youth and adversity, long before he and the public were upon speaking terms, Mr. George Jasper had found encouragement of a substantial sort with Messrs. Pittman, Pitt and Sanderson, of Ludgate Hill, which was a well-known explanation of the fact that this brilliant author clung in the main to a rather old-fashioned firm of publishers when the dimensions of his reputation gave him a proportionate choice. It explained also the circumstance that Mr. Jasper's notable critical acumen was very often at the service of his friend, Mr. Pitt—

Mr. Pittman was dead, as at least one member of a London publishing firm is apt to be—in cases where manuscripts of any curiously distinctive character from unknown authors puzzled his perception of the truly expedient thing to do. Mr. Arthur Rattray, of the *Illustrated Age*, had personal access to Mr. Pitt, and had succeeded in confusing him very much indeed as to the probable success of a book by an impressionistic young lady friend of his, which he called “An Adventure in Stageland,” and which Mr. Rattray declared to have every element of unconventional interest. Mr. Pitt distrusted unconventional interest, distrusted impressionistic literature, and especially distrusted books by young lady friends. Rattray, nevertheless, showed a suspicious indifference to its being accepted, and an irritating readiness to take it somewhere else, and Mr. Pitt knew Rattray for a sagacious man. And so it happened that, returning late from a dinner where he had taken refuge in two or three extremely indigestible dishes from being bored entirely to extinction, George Jasper found Elfrida’s

manuscript, in a neat, thick, oblong paper parcel, waiting for him on his dressing-table. He felt himself particularly wide awake, and he had a consciousness that the evening had made a very small inroad upon his capacity for saying clever things. So he went over "An Adventure in Stageland" at once, and in writing his opinion of it to Mr. Pitt, which he did with some elaboration a couple of hours later, he had all the relief of a revenge upon a well-meaning hostess, without the reproach of having done her the slightest harm. It is probable that if Mr. Jasper had known that the opinion of the firm's "reader" was to find its way to the author, he would have expressed himself in terms of more guarded commonplace, for we cannot believe that he still cherished a sufficiently lively resentment at having his hand publicly kissed by a pretty girl to do otherwise; but Mr. Pitt had not thought it necessary to tell him of this condition, which Rattray, at Elfrida's express desire, had exacted. As it happened, nobody can ever know precisely what he wrote except Mr. Pitt, who has forgotten, and Mr. Arthur

Rattray, who tries to forget; for the letter, the morning after it was received, which was the morning after the portrait met its fate, lay in a little charred heap in the fireplace of Elfrida's room when Janet Cardiff pushed the screen aside at last and went in.

Kendal had come as he promised and told her everything. He had not received quite the measure of indignant sympathy he had expected, and Janet had not laughed at the asterisks. On the other hand, she had sent him away, with unnatural gravity of demeanour, rather earlier than he meant to go, and without telling him why. She thought, as she directed the cabman to Essex Court, Fleet Street, that she would tell him why afterwards; and all the way there she thought of the most explicit terms in which to inform Elfrida that her letter had been the product of hardness of heart, that she really felt quite different, and had come to tell her, purely for honesty's sake, how she did feel.

After a moment of ineffectual calling on the other side of the screen her voice failed

her, and in dumb terror that would not be reasoned away it seemed that she saw the outlines of the long, still, slender figure under the bed draperies while she still looked helplessly at a flock of wild geese flying over Fugi Yama. Buddha smiled at her from the table with a kind of horrid expectancy, and the litter of papers round him in Elfrida's handwriting mixed their familiarity with his mockery. She had only to drag her trembling limbs a little further to know that the room was pregnant with the presence of death. Some white tube roses in a vase seemed to make it palpable with their fragrance. She ran wildly to the window and drew back the curtain; the pale sunlight flooding in, gave a little white nimbus to a silver ring upon the floor.

* * * * *

The fact may not be without interest that six months afterwards "An Adventure in Stageland" was published by Messrs. Lash and Black, and met with a very considerable success. Mr. Arthur Rattray undertook its

disposal, with the consent of Mr. and Mrs. Leslie Bell, who insisted without much difficulty that he should receive a percentage of the profits for his trouble. Mr. Rattray was also of assistance to them when, as soon as the expense could be managed, these two middle-aged Americans, whose grief was not less impressive because of its twang, arrived in London to arrange that their daughter's final resting-place should be changed to her native land. Mr. Bell told him in confidence that, while he hoped he was entirely devoid of what you might call race prejudice against the English people, it didn't seem as if he could let anybody belonging to him lie under the British flag for all time, and found it a comfort that Rattray understood.

Sparta is divided in its opinion whether the imposing red granite monument they erected in the cemetery, with plenty of space left for the final earthly record of Leslie and Margaret Bell, is not too expensive, considering Mr. Bell's means, and too conspicuous considering the circumstances. It has hitherto

occurred to nobody, however, to doubt the appropriateness of the texts inscribed upon it in connection with three little French words which Elfrida, in the charmingly apologetic letter which she left for her parents, commanded to be put there—“*Pas femme—artiste.*” Janet, who once paid a visit to the place, hopes in all seriousness that the sleeper underneath is not aware of the combination.

Miss Kimpsey boards with the Bells now, and her relation to them has become almost daughterly. The three are swayed to the extent of their capacities by what one might call a cult of Elfrida. Her death has long ago been explained by the fact that a grand-aunt of Mrs. Bell’s suffered from melancholia.

Mr. and Mrs. John Kendal’s delightful circle of friends say that they live an idyllic life in Devonshire. But even in the height of some domestic joy a silence sometimes falls between them still. Then, I fancy, he is thinking of an art that has slipped away

from him, and she of a loyalty she could not hold. The only person whose equanimity is entirely undisturbed is Buddha. In his place among the mournful Magdalens of Mrs. Bell's drawing-room in Sparta Buddha still smiles.

THE END.



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